Translation in Context: Cultural Globalization and Santiago Roncagliolo

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Translation in Context: Cultural Globalization and Santiago Roncagliolo

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APPROVED

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Abstract

This is a translation from Spanish to English of the short story “Una influencia criminal” [A Criminal Influence] by Santiago Roncagliolo, part of a collection of short stories titled *Crecer es un oficio triste* [Growing Up is Sad Business], also by Roncagliolo. A description and analysis of concurrent literary movements and themes accompanies the translation, placing “Una influencia criminal” into a literary context with the multinational movements known as McOndo and Generation X. Globalization can be considered to affect the movement and sharing of culture as an expansion of the economic dispersion of goods across the world, and so modern youth literature has adapted to take on more urban, international themes. McOndo and Generation X are both examples of these movements that have spread through several countries and share many common themes.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements i

Introduction 1

Santiago Roncagliolo 2

Cultural Globalization 5

Generation X, McOndo, and Global Youth Culture 8

Analysis of “A Criminal Influence” 16

The Role of Translation in Cultural Globalization 19

Endnotes 26

English Translation – “A Criminal Influence” 27

Works Cited 51

Appendix A: “Una Influencia Criminal” – Original Spanish 53

Written Capstone Summary 78
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Introduction
This project is a translation of a short story written by Santiago Roncagliolo and a discussion of the literary movements to which he belongs. With his novel *Abril rojo* [Red April], in 2006 Roncagliolo was the youngest author ever to win the *Premio Alfaguara de Novela*, a prestigious award given to the manuscript chosen that year from 510 applicants (Buzali 75). His previous novel, *Pudor* [Prudishness], was made into a movie adaptation released in Spain in April, 2007 (IMDB.com). He is also the author of several other published works, including three children’s books; *Rugor, el dragón enamorado* [Rugor, Dragon in Love], *La guerra de Mostark* [The Mostark War], and *Matías y los imposibles* [Matías and the Impossibles], his first novel, *El príncipe de los caimans* [Prince of Alligators], as well as a play performed worldwide titled *Tus amigos nunca te harían daño* [Your Friends Would Never Hurt You] (Alfaguara).

Santiago Roncagliolo is a Peruvian author born in Lima in 1975 who, since 2000, has lived and worked in Barcelona, Spain. He and his stories are therefore both products of several cultures, but his literature centers around youth in Latin America. Roncagliolo comments on his short story collection, *Crecer es un oficio triste* [Growing Up is Sad Business]: “si todos los protagonistas de estos cuentos tuviesen el mismo nombre, ésta podría ser una novela sobre la vida de un chico entre los seis y los viente años” [if all the protagonists of these stories had the same name, this could be a novel about the life of a boy between six and twenty years old] (Roncagliolo back cover). As it is, the stories are about different boys of different ages in different places, but they all have enough in common...
that they share many of the same themes. The characters experience the same kinds of problems that are shared across all youth at the end of the twentieth century, such as the influence of pop culture, violence, and identity crisis.

As a writer who has lived on two continents and speaks several languages, Roncagliolo is a perfect example of a global author (Alfaguara). In the story “Una influencia criminal” [A Criminal Influence], the protagonist is Peruvian but spent most of his childhood in Mexico. When he returns to Peru he feels no attachment to his native country. “Cuando regresamos (a Perú), no se me hizo fácil adaptarme a lo que mi familia llama ‘nuestro país’” (Roncagliolo 44) [When we returned (to Peru), it wasn’t easy for me to adapt to what my family called ‘our country’]. The increased movement of people and ideas across borders makes individual national identity less important and makes a greater generational identity more relevant. Roncagliolo explains, “creo que formo parte de una generación en la que la identidad nacional es cada vez menos importante(…). (En mis novelas) Lo importante de sus personajes no es la peruanidad sino la humanidad.” [I think that I make up a part of a generation that places less and less importance on national identity(…). (In my novels) the most important part of the characters is not their ‘Peruvianness’, but their humanity.] (Navarro-Albaladejo 245).

Like the narrator of “Una influencia criminal,” Roncagliolo spent his childhood in Mexico in political exile and describes feeling like a foreigner in the country of his birth. “Crecí en un país que no era el mío. Y luego regresé a un país que ya tampoco era el mío(…). Me costaba mucho entender el mundo” [I grew up in a country that wasn’t my own. And later I returned to a country that wasn’t
mine anymore either(…). Understanding the world came at a high price for me.]
(Navarro-Albaladejo 237).

In her interview with Roncagliolo and two other modern Latin American
writers, Natalia Navarro-Albaladejo paraphrases Zlatko Skribis by saying that “es
necesario entender el nacionalismo como algo complementario de la
globalización y no como un proceso contradictorio” [it is necessary to understand
nationalism as complementary to globalization rather than a contradicting
process] (Navarro-Albaladejo 232). Therefore, Roncagliolo’s story, while
retaining its national roots and identity, can be interpreted as having shifted to a
more global scale.
Cultural Globalization

Globalization is largely considered a strictly economic topic, but can be considered a cultural phenomenon as well. In the context of this essay, globalization includes the homogenization of culture through technology. In the novel iconic of 90’s youth culture *Historias del Kronen*, by José Ángel Mañas, the young protagonists constantly make references to international music groups, novels, and movies (Fouz-Hernández 92). Television and the Internet are especially globally pervasive, but there are other signs that worldwide cultures are converging. Beatriz Sarlo discusses this trend as reflected in the trees found in malls worldwide. In her book, *Siete ensayos sobre Walter Benjamin* [Seven Essays about Walter Benjamin], the chapter called “Árboles en el shopping-mall” [Trees in the shopping mall] discusses the fact that every shopping mall in the world is identical. “El shopping-mall se anticipa a todas las necesidades de sus visitantes(…). Sobre todo: no existen las diferencias nacionales” (Sarlo 54). [Shopping malls anticipate their visitors’ every need(…). Above all: national differences do not exist]. She discusses the idea that every mall is like a vacuum of identity, designed to replicate nature and peace with generic imagery. The décor even includes typical, nondescript plants, bio-engineered to look especially plant-like. Of course, the stores are also all identical. “Where you are feels sort of irrelevant these days (‘since everyone has the same stores in their mini malls’, according to my younger brother)” (Coupland). Everywhere in the world (given the same economic status) the same channels are playing on televisions, the same songs are playing on radios. Regardless of the country, there seem to be
McDonalds and Starbucks on every street corner. The same Internet is accessible by every computer. Youth who possess this technology all have access to the same materials and understand the same references. The young are able to master developing technology and swap ideas at ever-increasing speeds. “This process of globalization has been helped by the rapid advances of world-wide media and technology in the last quarter of this century. It is the huge impact of the media on young people that has contributed, through global advertising, to the ‘homogenization’ of youth culture around the world” (Fouz-Hernández 91).

Because of this, there is an apparent disconnect between this generation, sometimes referred to as the ‘Generation X’, and the previous ones. Karen Winey attributes the increasing generation gap to the concurrent surge in technology:

“Desde los años 60 se ha venido formando una subcultura joven aparte de la sociedad adulta. Puesto que los jóvenes contemporáneos se identifican más con los jóvenes de otros países que con sus padres, por el aumento de los medios de comunicación, se crea una distancia generacional que se nota muy visiblemente, quizás más que en épocas anteriores, a causa de la aceleración del desarrollo tecnológico de la comunicación mundial” [Since the sixties, a youth subculture has formed separate from adult society. Given that contemporary youth identify more with the youth of other countries than with their parents, due to the growth of communication media, a visible generation gap is created, perhaps even more than in previous generations because of the acceleration of development of communications technology worldwide]. (Winey 20)
It comes as no surprise then that the literature from this period is heavy with international pop culture references. Alberto Fuguet, one of the editors of _McOndo_, published an entire novel that uses the titles of popular American movies as chapter titles. It is an autobiography where he measures his life according to the movies he saw as an adolescent called _Películas de mi vida_ [Movies of my Life]. Every reference made can be understood by members of the same generation and socioeconomic class. After all, “(…)this luxury of doing nothing and having expensive habits is only possible for a minority of rich kids” (Fouz-Hernández 89). All of the teenagers who can afford to see movies and purchase drugs are seeing the same movies and taking the same drugs everywhere in the world. This is the audience of _Generación X_ [Generation X] and _McOndo_. 
**Generation X, McOndo and Global Youth Culture**

In the introduction to the short story anthology *McOndo*, the editors Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez state clearly that this collection of fiction is not their parents’ fiction. The intention is to break away from the traditional magical realism Latin America has been known for in the literary world. They cite *Cuentos con Walkman* [Stories with a Walkman], a previous anthology they edited, published in 1993, as part-inspiration for *McOndo*. According to the introduction of the fourth edition of *Cuentos con Walkman*, this style of literature is “una nueva generación literaria que es post-todo: post-modernismo, post-yuppie, post-comunismo, post-babyboom, post-capá de ozono. Aquí no hay realismo mágico, hay realismo virtual” [a new generation of literature that is post-everything: post-modern, post-yuppie, post-communist, post-baby boom, post-ozone layer. Here there is no magical realism, there is virtual realism] (Fuguet and Gómez 10).

*McOndo* follows this same path, but with a more global approach. Where *Cuentos con Walkman* collects only stories written by Chileans, in *McOndo* Fuguet and Gómez strove to collect stories from all over Latin America and Spain. “(…)sobre todo, nos asegurara una distribución por toda Hispanoamérica para así tratar de borrar las fronteras” [above all, we wanted to ensure a distribution across the entirety of Latin America in order to try and erase borders] (Fuguet and Gómez 11). This reflects the more global aspect of youth culture since although the stories come from various countries, they all deal with similar subjects. While
magical realism traditionally focused on rural life, the McOndo style of literature deals solely with the fast-paced, gritty, and violent urban adolescent lifestyle.

McOndo separates itself clearly from magical realism, but not as much from their literary “grandfathers” who coined the style as “Latin American”, such as Gabriel García-Márquez and Carlos Fuentes, but rather from their literary “parents” who have continued by “imitat(ing) the magical realism bent” (Blume 2). They want to break away from the world’s conception of Latin American literature as stuck in a quaint, rural period and present a more accurate version of how youth live today. “No desconocemos lo exótico y variopinto de la cultura y costumbres de nuestros países, pero no es posible aceptar los esencialismos reduccionistas, y creer que aquí todo el mundo anda con sombrero y vive en árboles” [We are familiar with the exotic and colorful parts of the culture and customs of our countries, but it’s impossible to accept the reduced essentials and to believe that here everyone walks with a sombrero and lives in trees] (Fuguet and Gómez 14).

The writers of McOndo are less concerned with impressing foreign publishing firms and are instead more focused on writing literature that appeals to them. Fuguet and Gómez compare their story collection with magical realism, drawing on the reasons they named the book McOndo in the first place: the title is a satire of Macondo, an imaginary village in Gabriel García Márquez’s novel Cien años de soledad [One Hundred Years of Solitude]. Fuguet and Gómez describe the similarities and differences between the new style of literature and the old in their introduction to McOndo:
“El nombre (¿marca-registrada?) McOndo es, claro, un chiste, una sátira, una talla. Nuestro McOndo es tan latinoamericano y mágico (exótico) como el Macondo real (que, a todo esto, no es real sino virtual)(…). En nuestro McOndo, tal como Macondo, todo puede pasar, claro que en el nuestro cuando la gente vuela es porque anda en avión o están muy drogados” [The name McOndo (trademark?) is clearly a joke, a satire, a stroke of wit. Our McOndo is as Latin American and magical (exotic) as the real Macondo (which, after all, isn’t real but virtual)(…). In our McOndo, as in Macondo, anything can happen, but of course in ours when people fly it’s because they are walking on an airplane or they’re on lots of drugs]. (Fuguet and Gómez 15)

The stories in *McOndo* are then part of the next logical step in Latin American literature, written by the generation of the 90’s. The world has changed, and it is reasonable that new literature should change and evolve in a corresponding manner.

“Generation X” as a term was first coined by Douglas Coupland in his novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. It originally referred to the youth in the United States in the 80’s, but connections have been drawn to literature in the 90’s in Spain and Latin America (Fouz-Hernández, de Urioste). According to Carmen de Urioste, one of the central themes of Generation X is “la relación del sujeto con los medios de comunicación” [the relationship between the subject and mass media] (de Urioste 460). She goes on to describe the violence, casual sex, and entire childhoods lived vicariously through movies. The radical
actions taken by characters in these novels are a result of “la violencia en la que viven inmersos los jóvenes—en el cine, en la literatura, en los conciertos, en la televisión, en la letra de las canciones—al no establecer los límites entre realidad y ficción” [the violence in which the youth are immersed—in movies, in literature, in concerts, in television, in song lyrics—the inability to establish the line between reality and fiction] (de Urioste 460). Movies and pop culture play such an integral part in the lives of these youth that nearly everything they do is some kind of reflection of what they have seen on a television screen. The protagonist of *Historias del Kronen* confesses proudly, “La cultura de nuestra época es audiovisual. La única realidad de nuestra época es la televisión” [Our era’s culture is audiovisual. The only reality of our time is television] and goes on to assert, “Cualquier película por mediocre que sea, es más interesante que la realidad cotidiana” [Any movie, however mediocre, is more interesting than day-to-day reality] (Mañas 74). One character goes so far as to describe sex as like being in a pornographic film (Fouz-Hernández 91). Pop culture is completely inextricable from the daily lives of these teenagers, and serves as either a comparison or an inspiration for everything that they do.

As described above, the stories in the *McOndo* anthology and the stories associated with the genre are almost exclusively Latin American, just as those of Generation X are tied to the United States and Spain. However, these two literary trends have much more in common than they have distinguishing features and could easily be considered the same movement. The Generation X label has been extended to cover several areas of literature, with descriptors that match most of
the same identifiers of the *McOndo* movement. Themes focus primarily on international pop culture, violence, peer pressure, and social isolation and insecurity. Just as the editor of *McOndo* uses North American movies for chapter titles, the protagonists of the Spanish *Historias del Kronen* use the same genres of North American films to help narrate the stories of their lives (Fouz-Hernández 92). A general overall identity crisis among the protagonists of these stories can also be observed. In “Amor a la distancia” [Love at a Distance] by Edmundo Paz Soldán, a story published in *McOndo*, the main character decides it would be more comfortable to publish a soul-bearing confession under the guise of literature for strangers to read than actually tell the object of his affection how he feels. After all, he concludes, “todo lo que se relaciona conmigo es, de una forma u otra, ficción” [everything related to me is, in one way or another, fiction] (Fuguet and Gómez 78). This intentional separation from reality is another theme in common across these genres.

In *Lo peor de todo* [Worst of All], a novel by Spanish author Ray Loriga which is also considered part of Generation X, the main character expressly states “creo que lo que uno se inventa es más real que lo que a uno le pasa” [I believe that what you invent is more real than what actually happens to you] (Loriga, 38). The characters actively seek extremes as a way to validate their existence and this, compounded with peer pressure and a general need to rebel, marks the violence that tends to permeate this genre. In *Historias del Kronen*, the characters are constantly using racists and sexist slang terms and they intentionally engage in behavior that is, at its core, a rebellion against society’s moral codes and laws.
Throughout the novel, the teenagers push themselves and each other to higher extremes of behavior—including driving at reckless speeds against traffic, fighting with baseball bats, driving drunk, and engaging in unprotected sex with strangers—culminating in Carlos, the main character, forcing his diabetic friend to drink an entire bottle of whiskey, thus killing him. Despite being constantly surrounded by all these friends and activities, isolation tends to be another major theme.

Because of their focus on international youth culture, both McOndo and Generation X should be considered as more global literature movements as opposed to regional ones. Not only are the same television shows on every screen on both sides of the Atlantic, but shared themes also unite Spanish, North American, and Latin American modern youth literature. More and more, as globalization becomes increasingly prevalent, all Spanish-language literature that represents contemporary youth culture is becoming borderless. Youth as reflected in McOndo and Generation X share the same global identity. However, regional differences remain important and must be considered. Significant regional differences still continue and can be seen in language usage (i.e. slang), geographical references, and historical influence.

Ronagliolo and the writers of McOndo alike “presentan una obra que desafía fronteras nacionales en su temática mediante la absorción de una homogeneizada forma de representación cultural” [present works whose themes defy national borders via the absorption of a homogenized form of cultural representation] (Navarro-Albaladejo 232). Roncagliolo’s short stories in Crecer
es un oficio triste deal with subjects relevant to Latin American youth today including violence, drugs, sex, isolation, and peer pressure. The family plays a large part in his stories and in most of them the family is different from the standard idea of a “healthy” family: two married parents and at least one child from that marriage. Divorce, abuse, and infidelity are common amongst the characters. In “Lucas y los colores de la nieve” [Lucas and the Colors of Snow] Lucas’ parents are separated. His father is a drunk who physically abuses his wife, and it takes Lucas disappearing on Christmas Eve to bring his parents together with any kind of civility.

In “Una influencia criminal” the narrator’s father is also referenced as an alcoholic, and there is mention of his friend Iván’s father having been possibly unfaithful to his wife. This is a theme shared frequently by Generation X and McOndo. “Divorce and the instability of the family have been acknowledged as two of the main concerns of the Generation (X)”, as there is an apparent disconnect between what is promoted as the societal ideal for a family and what actually is taking place. “The state sponsorship of an imagined/ideal family [is] an ideal which is difficult to sustain in the face of the brutalizing economic/moral instability of the end of the twentieth century” (Fouz-Hernández 88). While this statement applies to Spain in particular, the image of the “perfect family” is one that is relevant and held in high regard everywhere, and is impossible to actually achieve.

In “Un desierto lleno de agua” [A Desert Filled with Water], Vania, the main character, ends up having sex with a servant to prove to the friends who
won’t accept her that she is an adult and does not need them. Similarly, in “Una influencia criminal”, the narrator, Iván and their friend Mauricio goad each other into molesting—and eventually raping—Iván’s family’s live-in maid. Peer pressure and sex as a method of proving oneself to one’s peers is another theme that unites *Crecer es un oficio triste* with Generation X and *McOndo*.
Analysis of “A Criminal Influence”

The short story “Una influencia criminal” [A Criminal Influence], despite its heavy subject matter, does not carry a moral message. The story begins and ends with a funeral and sandwiches rape and racism in-between, but just like the protagonist in Historias del Kronen, the narrator of “Una influencia criminal” escapes his morally despicable adventure relatively unscathed and guilt-free. The story instead focuses on what is in essence a typical coming-of-age story at the core of which is an identity crisis. Not only is the protagonist of the story tied to several different countries with no real feeling of belonging to any of them, but he is ostracized in school and feels pressure to try and fit in. In an effort to be accepted the protagonist puts up a front to prove to others that he is mature and manly, but the reality of the situation is the opposite. The characters react to presented situations in immature ways which reflect an inner insecurity and lack of self-esteem. Though they spend the majority of the story getting drunk, sneaking looks at pornography and harassing the live-in maid, Iván and the narrator still see their actions as a game, something completely detached from the consequences of the adult world. This mindset lasts until the critical moment when they see an undressed Mauricio pull himself off of Flor and the huge bloodstain on his shirt. Throughout the story, the difference between reality and how the characters view themselves and the world is in stark contrast.

At the end of the story, Flor and Iván are both gone and the narrator seems to continue his life exactly as it was before. He leaves off with a hopeful statement about Patty, the girlfriend he mentions at the beginning of the story, and
the fact that he does not know how to dance. He seems to express more regret for
his lost friendship with Iván rather than his part for what happened to Flor. This
apathy and absence of guilt mirrors that of Carlos in Historias del Kronen. Carlos
leaves for vacation instead of attending his friend’s funeral and continues his life
exactly as it was before he played his part in his untimely death. Nobody takes
responsibility for their actions in “Una influencia criminal”, and there is no price
paid for Flor’s rape at all.

Most of the story is dedicated to describing how Iván and the narrator
grew up together, specifically how they were treated as outsiders in school and
were never considered popular. The events of their adolescence are ripe with
misunderstandings and rebellion, gradually growing in seriousness as they age
until the point of the rape. Of greatest importance to them is to maintain the
appearance of being macho, even if privately the narrator admits to himself that
such things aren’t important to him. When he and Iván find Iván’s father’s
pornographic magazines, they take turns with them to masturbate in the bathroom.
However, during these sessions the narrator merely sits in the bathroom and waits
until he thinks an appropriate and impressive amount of time has passed before he emerges again. He is continuously weaving fictional tales about his sexual
conquests to his friends, and while he impresses most of them and believes he is
being risqué, the stories themselves are childish and reflect his young age.

It is clear that Iván and the narrator have no grasp of the consequences of
their actions as they harass Flor, treating each new action as the next logical step
in becoming men. The narrator does not realize what they are doing to her until he
sees Mauricio with the bloodstain on his shirt. Iván, however, seems to realize a bit sooner. After his time in the room with Flor, he becomes a nervous wreck and says, “Entré y me quedé mirando, no paraba de llorar, ni siquiera me acerqué(...) no pude hacer nada, no pude ni tocarla” [I went in and took a good look at her, she couldn't stop crying, I didn't even go near her(...) I couldn’t do anything, I couldn’t even touch her] (Roncagliolo 57). He starts to cry, and through this the narrator maintains his “official” story about violating Flor while in fact he did nothing at all, thus alienating Iván completely in order to maintain his manly image.

The importance the characters place on maintaining an acceptable identity in the face of peer pressure clearly outweighs any sense of guilt of shame associated with the harassment and rape. Though this, “Una influencia criminal” is an example of the global concerns of youth in a universal situation where violence and sex are confused as instruments of power and prestige.
The Role of Translation in Cultural Globalization

Translating a short story, even if it is only one story from an entire collection, carries a particular relevance; bringing a story from one language into another opens it up to an entirely new audience. A short story is an easily-manageable length, even for someone who does not typically enjoy reading. Poetry, while often very short in length, tends to have a more restricted audience. Therefore short stories are more accessible than a novel or poetry would be, and are likely read by a larger audience. In this manner translating a story is like bringing any other form of information across the globe. Globalization has affected more than just the world economy; it doesn’t stop at the sharing of commerce and business. As people spread goods around the world, so too are ideas spread—and among these, cultural items such as literature are included. With the increasing trend in global awareness and exponentially improving means of communication, bringing accessible global literature to a worldwide audience is essential. “La cultura es un proceso de ensamblado multinacional, una articulación flexible de partes, un montaje de rasgos que cualquier ciudadano de cualquier país, religión o ideología puede leer y usar” [Culture is a process of multinational assembly, a flexible articulation of parts, a collection of features that any citizen of any country, religion or ideology can read and use] (García-Canclini 16). In order for literature to be accessible to the average resident of a particular country, it has to be in that country’s language. The role of translation is, therefore, to impartially turn literature—a cultural artifact—into something
legible for a new audience. The process should be seamless, an invisible cog in the machine of our international culture.

One general theory of translation is that it is, at its most basic, an impossible task. In order for information to travel across the language barrier, however, it needs to be translated. Therefore, as stated by Willis Barnstone, "If we seek near-full equivalence, the best we can hope for is 'creative transposition,' with an emphasis on 'creative' if the translation is literary" (Barnestone 11). This is generally thought to be accurate, but the argument between theorists is then in deciding what the proper balance between creative and literal actually is. A compromise needs to be found and maintained between accessibility in the target language and accuracy toward the original text. This is a difficult and incredibly personal task, as expressed by Matthew Arnold in his lectures "On Translating Homer", "The translator's 'first duty,' says Mr. Newman, 'is a historical one, to be faithful.' Probably both sides would agree that the translator's 'first duty is to be faithful'; but the question at issue between them is, in what faithfulness consists" (Barnestone 41). Each individual will translate a given text uniquely, drawing on their own philosophies. This is the source of the differences among the various translation theories.

According to Barnstone, there are three basic theories of translation. They function more as a gradient, and a translator may find themselves somewhere in between two of his classifications. They are "literalism", "middle ground", and "license" (Barnestone 26). Those who prescribe to the more literal theory of translation believe that a translation should be a word-for-word
transcription of the original, as faithfully identical as humanly possible. As a result, these translations tend to be nonliterary and tend to be more applicable toward nonfiction and informative works. License allows for a free-form recreation of the work and tends to view the translator as a consecutive author with little to no obligation to the source text. The middle ground is a compromise between these two schools of thought. The middle ground theory of translation is described by one theorist as "faithful but autonomous restatement", for while it allows for some creative variation there remains pressure to be true to the original author (Steiner 253).

There are many aspects of translation which make the act difficult and complicated, making context and common sense important tools in selecting a best guess when a phrase, idiom or word has no direct translation. Sentences such as ‘the cat climbed the tree’ are straightforward enough, but when culturally-specific items such as idioms and slang appear, more care must be taken and research conducted to find a suitable translation.

Names are sometimes difficult to translate, and often become especially problematic when translating across different alphabets (i.e. English to Chinese). Luckily, Spanish and English use functionally the same alphabet. While Spanish contains three extra letters (ch, ll and rr), Spanish and English both use all of the same characters. What could be considered an exception to this generalization is the use of accents in Spanish, which are functionally absent in English. In Spanish, accents serve to mark the emphasized syllable of a word, especially when that emphasis falls on a syllable that breaks the standard rules for Spanish
syllabification. In “Una influencia criminal”, the character’s name ‘Iván’ is not pronounced the same as the English ‘Ivan’, though they are clearly related names. Maintaining the accent through the translation reminds the English-speaking reader that the name Iván is Latin American, not Anglo-American, and preserves some of the geographical roots of the story. Furthermore, leaving the accent over the ‘A’ in Iván is a mark of respect for the character. If Iván were a real person, it could be assumed that he would continue to write his name with the accent no matter which country he were in, since it is the name given to him by his family and does not change with geographical location or language spoken.

Slang varies greatly among Spanish-speaking countries, and so care must be taken when translating from Spanish to keep the country of origin—and its particular use of slang—closely in mind. This problem is especially notable in a story like “Una influencia criminal”, where the characters have roots in more than one Latin American country. Many Spanish slang terms that are crude and offensive in one country mean something completely benign and commonly used in another country, and so context becomes especially important. For instance, on page 51 of “Una influencia criminal”, the narrator makes a reference to “la trola”. In Argentina and Uruguay, the term “trola” is often used as slang to refer to a prostitute, while in Mexico the word refers to an incendiary match and in Spain what North Americans would call a ‘little white lie’ (Fitch). Since the narrator of the story grew up in Mexico and is living in Peru as he tells his story, either the Mexican or the Peruvian definition of the word could be intended. However, in the context of the surrounding sentences it becomes clear that the narrator is not
referring to a match, but rather to his penis. Once this definition is established, more questions about the nature of slang arise. For instance, in this case the technical anatomical word in English for “trola” would not be appropriate, since the technical anatomical term was not what the character chose to use. How juvenile, crass, or offensive a word is has to be maintained as closely as possible when translating the word to another language along with any connotations the word may have. A native speaker’s explanation of a particular slang term can be invaluable in this case, since they will have a similar level of familiarity with the term as the character that uses it and the closest equivalent possible in English can then be found.

The same types of games are played by adolescents everywhere, but go by different names and different rules depending on location. Most people in the United States have played ‘spin the bottle’ at least one point in their lives, as well as ‘rock paper scissors’. In “Una influencia criminal”, the protagonists play “drunken bottle” with the opposite sex and “Fu Manchu” to impartially select which person goes first. These titles have been translated literally from their original Spanish (“botella borracha” and “Fu Manchu”, respectively) in order to preserve this regional difference. The average reader should be able to identify the purpose of these games from the context given, rather than rely on an approximate English version. Since such games pass on via word of mouth and vary widely even within a specific country, substituting a North American game may even defeat the purpose. If the name of a game from the Southwestern region of the United States is chosen, a reader from London, England or even from Seattle,
Idioms are a unique translational barrier. In “Una influencia criminal”, Iván says “Los peruanos parecen vivir con una estaca atravesada en el hígado” (Roncagliolo 49). Literally, word for word, this translates as ‘Peruvians seem to live with a stake through their liver’. While an interesting and forceful image, the intended message doesn’t quite make it across in the English version. Drawing from context and what is known about Iván’s character throughout the story, a similar English idiom can be found and substituted instead. “Peruvians seem to live with a stick up their ass” conjures a less anatomical and more metaphorical image in the average American mind and is a more appropriate statement for Iván to make in an English context.

In Spanish, sentences are commonly left without a subject. The reader then uses a combination of context and the conjugation of any associated verbs to understand which characters are performing an action and which are speaking. This can be somewhat confusing when, as in the case in "Una influencia criminal", the text switches rapidly between first and third person, especially since in several tenses in Spanish both the first and third person are conjugated identically. The narrator of "Una influencia criminal" speaks in first person throughout the story, but since quotation marks are never used to identify speech, sentences jump from first to third person often without warning. In certain tenses this can be confusing. For instance, there is a scene in “Una influencia criminal” where Iván is telling the narrator what happened while he was in Flor’s room. The narrator describes
not only what Iván is saying about Flor, but also what the narrator himself is thinking about Iván and Flor without quotation marks or paragraph breaks to indicate a change in thought. In Spanish, the section is “Iván dijo: Entré y me la quedé mirando, no paraba de llorar, ni siquiera me acerqué. Yo quería decirle que no fuera idiota, que al menos la toqueteara como todos” [Iván said: I went in and took a good look at her, she couldn't stop crying, I didn't even go near her. I wanted to tell him not to be an idiot, that at the very least he should touch her same as always] (Roncagliolo 57). The first section is marked by an “Iván dijo” [Iván said], which implies that the sentence following is what Iván actually said to the narrator as spoken by Iván in the first person. The sentence afterward, however, is also in the first person and there is no change to indicate that someone else is speaking or thinking. The verb “fuera” is a conjugation of the verb “to be”, and could either be in the command form or the past conditional. The sentence “Yo quería decirle que no fuera idiota, que al menos la toqueteara como todos” could either be Iván still talking to the narrator and referring to Flor as the idiot who is touching someone or the text has switched back to the narrator’s overall description of the event. The first option does not make sense contextually, and the use of “la” in “la toqueteara” (instead of “lo”, which is the masculine form) implies that a female is being touched. Since Flor is the only female in the scene, it can be determined that the narration switches back from Iván’s dialogue to the main character’s narration. But there is no verbal cue and no confirmation of the identity of the pronoun “le” in “decirle” to indicate who the sentence is referring to; the translation has to be drawn from the context of the story.
Contributions from native speakers of the text’s original language are as invaluable in translation as the story’s context. Cultural influences are rampant in every literary work, and to identify them well enough to translate them into another language often requires input from someone who has had extended experience with the culture. Ideally, the end product will be as fluid and natural to read in the target language as it was in its original language; a native speaker provides an extra resource, in addition to context, for dealing with translating tricky sentence structures, idioms, and nuanced vocabulary.

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1 All English translations in [brackets] translated by Megan K. Moore unless otherwise stated.
2 English translations of these book titles from Cruz López.
3 Magical realism is a style of literature made famous during the ‘Boom’ period in Latin America, marked by authors such as Gabriel García Márquez. It typically portrays a standard rural setting with certain fantastical elements which are often treated by the characters as normal, every-day occurrences.
A Criminal Influence

Story by Santiago Roncagliolo

Translation by Megan K. Moore
Uncle Jon died Wednesday. Aunt Mary told me the next day, just after I asked Patty out. I hadn’t spoken with Aunt Mary in eight years. She was shattered. The way she told it, Uncle Jon woke up at five in the morning with a pain in his arm and, minutes later, his heart stopped. That’s how heart attacks announce themselves. When dad felt bad, his arm also hurt. Dad has had two operations on his heart and hasn’t stopped smoking, drinking like a Cossack or eating like a Viking. In contrast, the last time I saw Uncle Jon he’d given up cigarettes and lost almost ninety pounds. And he was still fat. He was the fattest man I had ever met in my life. One time, when I was about nine years old, I heard him playing the cajón. I say heard but not saw, nobody could see anything under his immense, gelatinous body. That time, Aunt Mary was playing the guitar and singing. Their son Iván, my friend, was playing the spoons. Toby was still too small to be playing an instrument, but he was running around anyway. They were enjoying themselves. I remember that I thought, He was such a huuuuge man, but what caught my attention was that a father sang with his children instead of getting drunk and yelling at them about what a whore their mother was. It’s ironic that my dad is still alive and the only good losing ninety pounds did for Uncle Jon was allow him to fit into a standard-sized coffin.

Yesterday afternoon Iván arrived from Venezuela. He doesn’t hate me, though, now that I think about it, he wouldn’t have a reason to hate me. When I found out he was coming I thought of canceling my date with Patty but I didn’t; it wasn’t easy to meet her and, anyway, this weekend I need to relax. It’s weird to

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A cajón is a musical instrument shaped like a box. It is played by sitting on top of it and beating out a rhythm with the hands.
see a strange, adult version of Iván. He and I were best friends in grade school since a political amnesty permitted dad to return to Peru. When we returned, it wasn’t easy for me to adapt to what my family called “our country”. Until then, according to my Mexican documents, I had been living in political exile. I was seven years old. I was a danger to the public, we laughed with dad some time later. Sometimes we laughed.

My friend Iván, however, had nothing to do with this part of me. On the contrary, Uncle Jon was an entrepreneur and hated Reds. In any case, during school dad never had much contact with the fathers of other families. Which was for the best. I don’t think he would have liked them. It was mom who met Aunt Mary while delivering notebooks and asked her son to look for me. I had problems adapting because I came from a tiny, English, secular co-ed school. From there I had fallen into a concentration camp saturated with two thousand dwarfs with pretensions of breeding. The worst was that I didn’t play soccer. This, here, was enough to make me a little less than nobody.

Luckily we were both nobodies. Iván showed up one day at the entrance to school and he explained that his mom told him that we had to be friends. I didn’t like him at first because I was accustomed to reading during recesses. But we meshed very quickly. Iván explained many words to me that I didn’t understand. In truth, he didn’t understand them either but he knew they were insults and he knew how to respond to them: if someone says “your mother” you should say “your mother” or even “your-old-lady-from-Sankokai-turning-tricks-in-the-
avenue-Abancay-scrubbing-her-ass-with-soap-from-Camay”. Iván said that these insulted mothers, but he couldn’t explain more. I had no idea whose mother or why we were supposed to insult her. What we did know were some important gestures. If they raise their middle finger toward you, you should make a circle with your thumb and index finger and stick a finger in the hole in the direction of the aggressor, moving it forward and backward. Eventually, the finger can be replaced with a mechanical pencil, a spoon or even a piece of sugarcane, whatever works. Another key word was "fuck": if someone tells a joke with the verb "fuck", you have to laugh. Iván was therefore able to laugh sincerely with these boys, but he didn't know why he was laughing either. He laughed out of habit. We recently learned what this verb means when that idiot, Pochito Gonzalez, decided to "fuck" the religion teacher. He circled behind her while she was handing out exams and, taking advantage of the confusion, kneed her in her ass. To fuck wasn't to knee or to hit anybody, or even to hurt them, he was only trying to put his knee between her buttocks. But the teacher screamed and ran from the classroom while Pochito laughed with two other retards in a corner and Tito, who was in charge of discipline, told him off because one does not fuck teachers, that's what classmates are for.

Not even five minutes passed before the area's child psychologist entered, furious, to set the entire room straight: Here you are all little men, eh? Here you're already big enough to fuck. I see now, you're all very manly. So tell me, what does fucking mean? What? Now nobody knows what it is? But you do it so well. No? You should know if you do it every day. You even do it to each other! The
entire room turned red, looked downward and kept silent. I thought that it was a
great way to shut people up, asking what fucking means. If the teachers wanted us
to behave ourselves, they could have asked us this every day. But in reality I
wanted to know the answer and I was happy when the one chosen to answer,
obviously Pochito Gonzalez, the idiot, had to stand up. What's wrong, Pocho?,
The psychologist provoked him, you don’t remember anymore? Answer! And
Pocho, who was originally very Indian, almost black, but was now as red as a
meatball bathed in ketchup, mumbled something that no one understood. What
did you say? Asked the psychologist, speak louder! We all want to know! But
Pocho continued murmuring without ungluing his eyes from the floor while I
chewed my nails in suspense, mentally begging him to turn up the volume.
Finally, after various orders from the psychologist, Pocho whispered, in a manner
that could only be heard tenuously in the sepulchral silence of the room: To make
love. And in this moment, thousands of conversations, gestures, fights, sermons
and even tears made sense for me and for my friend.

I remembered all of this yesterday as I embraced Iván after eleven years. I
was afraid he would offer some resistance, but I suppose that he already forgot the
last incident. Or maybe he was simply too worried for his family. His father was
in the middle of the room between four fake torches and Aunt Mary on one side,
her face crawling with tears. She had lived only for her family, my mom always
said that she had endured many things from her husband. I suspected that mom
was speaking of infidelities, but it never occurred to me that a guy so fat could
have a lover. If he lay on top of her he'd kill her, I always thought. It took a long
time for me to understand that to have a lover is not a question of size but rather of how much of a bastard you are, and position is a question of creativity. Because of this I asked my mother what things aunt Mary tolerated and my mother replied: Everything, son, everything. I never understood that being cheated on was everything. I suspected that it could have been beatings, because Aunt Mary was very Catholic and mom was also very Catholic during the time dad was beating her. I remember because my sister and I had to suffer through everything with her, Saturdays spent watching dad hit her and the Sundays being bored through mass. But I never came to understand what aunt Mary tolerated in Uncle Jon. Now, as I revisit these memories, I realize that I didn't understand anything about anything. And yesterday, in front of the casket in which uncle Jon laid, new things I didn't understand emerged. After several years one believes that one knows everything already and doesn't need to learn anymore. The mind closes like a bar at dawn. But reality is always kicking open the door. Yesterday, many images shook off the dust from my memory and I tried with all my strength to banish them by thinking of the tiny, desirable ass of Patty, which was so close now.

But I didn't have much success. The past was stronger than her ass and it exploded in my head without mercy. After awhile in the wake, a priest friend of the family gave a brief liturgy for those of us that were there. In his last year of life, Uncle Jon had been coming to church often, always with enthusiastic devotion, according to the priest. He volunteered with the parish in his free time, which he had a lot of because since his return from Venezuela he hadn't been able
to acquire a job. Aunt Mary had been carrying the weight of supporting the household on her English teacher's salary, but luckily Iván stayed there to study in a state university for almost free in a little town off the coast there, where with a part-time job he was able to make a living because there's nothing to spend money on. Iván knew all the silly songs of the liturgy. This was one of the differences that we discovered when we reunited: he studied in a college of Opus Dei and I'd stayed in a Jesuit college until the end. Iván was inclined toward medicine in a country of tropical diseases and I toward literature in a country without readers. Iván lives a peaceful, rural life with his girlfriend of forever, and me with my girlfriends that don't even last two months. Iván didn't drink or smoke and I carried marijuana to the wake thinking it would relax him. Of course in the end I didn't even offer him any, the weed is still waiting in my bag in case someone needs it. But I don't know if this is the right moment, either. This is already not as fun as it used to be. Nothing is. Not even finally going out with Patty, who wanted to go to a winery where we could ask for a bottle that cost about thirty dollars and we ended up broke.

The first time I drank was also with Iván, when we were about ten years old. He had stayed overnight at my house and we'd woken up really early. In the living room, a half-full bottle of whiskey formed part of the debris of dad's last drinking binge. I said that I always drank, and that if he heard a lot of noise at night it was dad, his friends and me partying. And to demonstrate how macho I was, I took a long swallow from the bottle and made the usual face, although inside I felt like I'd drunk hydrochloric acid. Iván asked if the whiskey was good.
As I said yes, he took an equal swallow and made a face like he was eating fire. Then he asked if we were drunk already. I told him I don't think so, and drank more. When dad woke up, about eleven in the morning, Iván had already vomited three days worth of food and I had fallen right back asleep. Then the three of us agreed that the subject would not leave the room and we would eat breakfast, but dad was confused and poured salt instead of sugar into the milk and poor Iván began vomiting again. I couldn't help it, I pissed myself laughing.

We laughed a lot, actually, especially when we were playing "I don't give a fuck", a great game that we invented by chance. It consisted of running onto the soccer field during games and kicking the ball with all our strength as far as possible. When our classmates protested, we yelled "I don't give a fuck, I don't give a fuck" and ran. I don't understand why no one cut off our heads for that. I suppose that they had some pity for us because Iván and I were always left for last when the captains picked teams. We were picked as "two for one" or, if the teams were already paired off, we were left out and were relegated into the category of pariahs to keep score. And even if we got to play nobody ever passed us the ball. Because of this, "I don't give a fuck" was more than a game, it was an attitude, a rebellion with a cause, a form of life. Aunt Mary knew this, and so she called me instead of Mauricio to pick up Iván, to accompany him during the wake through the interminable line of all these people, related to him through blood and life, who don't mean anything more to him anymore than a passport left in the bottom of a drawer. Peruvians seem to live with a stick up their ass, Iván said suddenly. I didn't even ask him if he was thinking of coming back. When he said "Peruvians"
it sounded like he'd said "Somalians" or "Mohecans", those foreigners of a country so remote in time and mind.

After the liturgy we went to Iván's grandparents' house. His parents were living in the basement and Toby slept in a room upstairs. It was a big house, but not as nice as the one they had before in San Isidro, where Iván and I flipped through Uncle Jon's pornography magazines in secret. Our lives were never the same after we accidentally found those magazines. We started to do our homework at his house and we also went to play there and even I slept over. In the end, I gave whatever pretext to see them. We preferred Hustler, which were the boldest and not only had nudes but also scenes of them doing it. They were also the ones that had the stickiest pages, but this was manageable. We chose the best ones and took turns going to the bathroom to jerk off. I never came there, in reality. The bathroom didn't have a lock and I was terrified that someone would find me. I was limited to hiding the magazine under the bathmat and sitting there to pass the time. Then since I couldn't come there, only in my house alone, I borrowed the magazines from Iván. He said that he could only lend me the ones from the bottom of the box, and took a lot of care to leave them as they were to the exact millimeter so his father wouldn't notice their absence. One day I carried the magazines hidden under my shirt and, unluckily, in the doorway I ran into Uncle Jon, who asked me to carry some boxes from the car. I spent ten dreadful minutes carrying those heavy boxes at my chest and feeling like I would ruin the magazine right in Uncle Jon's face and Aunt Mary would be scandalized and Uncle Jon would kick me out. In the end they never noticed. But since then I
didn't want to go to the bathroom anymore, not even to pretend to jerk off.

The discovery of the magazines allowed us to feel better about ourselves also because, as the years passed, our conversations and walks around the patio, sometimes hugging, had earned us the title of the most persistent pair of fags in the school. We were just friends and the rest of the world could stick their comments up their ass. When dad did something stupid while drunk, I told Iván the next day. More than once I cried in front of him because I knew I could. But, with time, we started to have a reputation to maintain. We were already big, we were thirteen years old. Talking about his dad's magazines always gave us a good rep. Iván even invited Mauricio to see them one day, and Mauricio was one of the most popular kids in the class. Later, when I found my own dad's magazines, I also shared my discovery.

I should have started to become interested in fiction during this time, because I discovered that I could invent erotic stories that other boys believed. Like the one about the older girl—fourteen years old—with whom I played "drunken bottle". And when it was my turn with her, her friends gave us a room and we kissed on the bed and I think—here I said, I think—my trousers moved, and I had shorts on that were very wide so that Junior could come out, and I'm sure that, at least for a second, it stuck there, so it could be that I'm not a virgin anymore. Or the one day when I hid in my cousin's bathroom and she started to change in her room and I saw her from the keyhole. I had tons of stories and everyone believed them, or at least they wanted to believe them. Iván quickly figured out that I was lying and learned to make up his own stories.
But one time we had a true story, at least more or less true. The story of Flor. At this time my parents had just separated. Given the circumstances, including appointments with a psychologist that didn't leave me time to play on Friday afternoons, mom decided that I needed my friends very much. Since I only had one, she decided that I should see him as often as possible. I started to stay at Iván's house at least one night a week, and his parents started to use these nights to go out, so we spent the nights alone with Flor, a girl recently down from Albancay who worked in the house. Of course she wasn't pretty or nice; she was fat like a tamale and didn't speak Spanish very well. She didn't even have teeth. But she had the most important thing: she was a biologically complete woman. All that we needed.

We started only with looks. First discreet and fleeting, later more frank. Flor didn't even realize that we were observing her with strings of drool sliding down our chins. One day I said to her How beautiful you are, Flor, and she avoided me. Another day, Iván brought her a branch of flowers he stole from the park and she put them in a vase in the living room. She didn't even say thank you. In general, either she was so dumb that she didn't understand anything or she was completely indifferent to our existence and her own. Little by little we started to harass her incrementally more without knowing if it bothered her, pleased her or if she just didn’t care. She never reacted to anything. Via a strategic meeting, Iván and I made a decision: to continue forward, but to leave the flattery and gayness behind.

Our approach accelerated after that. The next night I stayed downstairs in
my pajamas in the kitchen. Flor continued readying the table for the next day's breakfast. Flor, I asked her, do you want to be my girlfriend? What did you say, boy?, she said, trying to leave. I obstructed her path. I asked if you want to be my girlfriend, Flor, I like you very much. Don't bother me, boy, I'm going to bed now, she said. I asked her if she wanted to sleep alone. Behind me, Iván was laughing silently. When Flor became quiet, Iván said: answer the guy, guests need to be treated well. I believe that in this moment, for the first time, Flor understood what we were talking about. She lowered her head and tried to leave, but my arm was immovable in front of her. If you want to pass, you have to pay a toll, Flor. And Flor asked what toll, she didn't understand, while Iván watched and ate cookies that Aunt Mary had baked that afternoon. Flor surely wanted to tell him that those cookies were for your mother's meeting, boy, but she had more urgent problems to solve, like me. Excuse me, young man, and this time she pushed a little on my arm. I let her pass but I put my hand on her ass. It bothered her but she didn’t say anything. Why are you acting like you don’t like me? I managed to say. Iván laughed and we went to sleep that day feeling very manly.

Soon, harassing Flor became our favorite pastime. Each time Iván's parents couldn't see, our hands passed quickly over every inch of Flor's body and then our faces became masks of "I'm a saint". I've always been bad at dancing, and today when Patty wanted to go dancing I had to overlook my annoyance. But when Aunt and Uncle weren't home, I asked Flor to dance with me and I pawed her wherever I could. Boy, don't bother me!, she complained unsuccessfully. Boy, let me go, but I told her that she was my girlfriend and that we were going to get
married, that I was going to bring her to meet my family, and I didn't know if she believed me or if she was really so stupid that she didn't understand what was going on. Sometimes, if we didn't bother her too much, she was so docile that it seemed like she actually liked us.

One day she complained. It was when she told Aunt Mary that her son was bothering her and touching her. Uncle Jon started laughing at the incident: Reign in your excitement, he told us, since Flor is uglier than a kick in the nuts. But Aunt Mary warned us that we should calm down or she'd ban me from sleepovers. I suspect that her main preoccupation wasn't respect toward the employee, but rather that her son was already old enough to impregnate the halfbreed. We weren't, neither him nor I. We envied our classmates who already had hair in their armpits. Some already shaved. Sometimes I tried to put on a deeper voice to pretend, but everyone laughed at me. More than worry us, our hormonal delay was a stimulus. I had read that the liquid that we sprayed when we came was not fertile semen, therefore if we screwed Flor she wouldn't become pregnant: Coconut milk, Iván, pure coconut milk, there's no risk. Iván considered the possibilities of porking the maid between laughing and joking. But in reality, we began to imagine bizarre scenes where the odor of Flor's armpit killed us before we could take off any clothes, or that we couldn't enter her because spiderwebs blocked our path. Between fantasies, guffaws, and pillow fights we fell asleep without planning anything seriously. The situation lasted for a couple of months. We kept putting our hands on a resigned Flor, by now accustomed to us and more bored than offended by our conduct. Until one day, while I was touching her in
the kitchen, Flor pushed me against the pantry and yelled, Do not to touch me!, that badly conjugated, do not to touch me, she said. I became furious that she pushed me. Who did she think she was? Now you're fucked, halfbreed, I told her, now you’ve won first prize, I am going to rape you. Flor muttered something, but now Iván was behind her and she couldn't escape easily. We started to scare her: We're going to rip off your clothes and we're going to stick it in all your holes until you scream. She tried to free herself and I caught her by the waist. Iván took off his belt. She began to flail a bit in the air. Calm down, Flor, aren't we dating? Why are you resisting? I pushed her against the fridge and stopped in front of her, so close that I smelled her odor of pickled onions. I touched her chest. She didn't resist this time, only looked me in the eyes. I never found out what she wanted to say with that look, because immediately we heard the voice of Uncle Jon from the door: Hello, family.

Yesterday Uncle Jon was a fluffy marshmallow, so it was difficult for me to believe that he had such a thunderous voice. Everything seemed to shake when he yelled. Actually, everything seemed to shake even when he walked. But, considering that he was boorish enough for some things, he had a certain innocence of youth and bullet-proof optimism. I remember that the last time we met he spoke to me of his interest in receiving the plan for repatriation from Croacia. Uncle Jon had never been there, but his grandfather was Yugoslavian, and up until the third generation his descendants could move to the country with tributary benefits and secured employment in the postwar reconstruction. I believe that the only reason they hadn't left for Eastern Europe was because aunt Mary
insisted that at the very least they learn Croatian before going. They never did, but Uncle Jon was already communicating via the Internet with some dubious relatives of his that had been living in Bosnia since the seventies. They'd even exchanged photos and planned a typical Croatian dinner for their meeting.

With how good-natured he was about certain things, when Uncle Jon became angry it could be a little savage. Iván once came to school with his neck as red as an apple, but I think that this wasn't so much from anger as from affection. I think that his bad moods were one of the things that mom said that aunt Mary had to tolerate, above all at the end, when he didn't have a job and stayed home all day and rejected all the offers that didn't appear to be "up to his standards" (which is to say, all of them) and he could become a little violent if she pushed him. Because of this, when he came home we stopped bothering Flor. But his arrival was also useful for us, because finally we created our grand plan for the next time they weren't home.

The opportunity came two weeks after: one of Aunt Mary's brothers had a birthday. It would be a huge party for sure. Iván told his family that he didn't want to go, that he preferred to stay and play because he'd be bored hanging out with so many old people. Uncle Jon and Aunt Mary understood, they were very understanding and didn’t give him any ‘buts’. We even invited Mauricio to join our trashy gang, a great boy this Mauricio, so educated, said Aunt Mary, the poor fool. The ‘educated boy’ came with two packs of cigarettes and, when uncle Jon and aunt Mary left, went to buy beer "for my dad, ma'am". They sold them to him no problem and he brought them home in grocery bags in case a neighbor saw
him. When he came back, we went up to the roof where the laundry room was and opened the bottles between the sheets and underwear left out to dry. The beer was much smoother than the whiskey, much easier to drink. And we had four large bottles. Even if this didn't get us sufficiently sick, the cigarettes could be counted on to. And most importantly, we had Flor. We played Fu Manchu to decide which order we would go in and I won. We made a toast and I emptied an entire glass down my throat, put out my cigarette on the floor, and entered.

Flor's room was dark as a cave, and I could only see the silhouette of its occupant sitting on the bed. The twilight didn't permit me to see her eyes, which was a relief. I could only see the lump in the middle of the bed, almost a sack of rice sitting there. I know that you've been waiting for me, Flor, your boyfriend has arrived, but she didn't move or say anything, Don't be afraid, I'm not going to hurt you, I only want to give you a hug, and she sought the protection of the wall, fleeing like a small animal. Where are you going? and she stuck to the wall and said, what do you want, boy? What do you want, boy, as if you don't know, and as if you don't want it. Why, mama? Aren't we dating, or what? She didn't respond. I leapt to her and started to touch her. She wanted to push me away. She was bigger than I was but I was stronger and I caught her arms against the bed, pinning my body against hers. She didn't even smell good, but I put my hands on her ass and on her tits until I was tired of having to dry my hands every time I wanted to put them on a key place. She moaned, but she didn't even yell, only tried to get away. After ten minutes I calculated that I had been inside for enough time to leave with my head held high and I left. I know that we're dating, I said as I left, but I also
have to think of my friends, and now I'm going to share you with them.

I left among the laughter and the toasts of Mauricio and Iván, who entered immediately after. While we were listening to Flor's muffled sobs, Mauricio asked me, did you screw her? and I responded no, that would have been disgusting, but Mauricio expressed his opinion that this wasn't important, that a woman is a woman and that's why they're here, and even more to be able to screw her and to not do so means you're a fag. I couldn't change my version of the story, but I exaggerated my pawing for his delight and my reputation.

When Iván came out Mauricio repeated his interrogation. He had also limited himself to pawing and Mauricio also reprimanded him for his ineptitude. I tried to imagine what it would be like to screw her if it was so difficult to simply feel her up against her efforts to escape. And I said If you're going to talk so much, why don't you go in there and screw her yourself, I had also talked about this with Iván various nights and more and more it freaked me out. It wasn't a bad thing to not have screwed her. It was hygienic. But Mauricio didn't think so. He finished his drink and passed his cigarette to Iván. Then he entered like toreadors enter the arena. He was only missing the triumphant music. Iván and I sat in silence, smoking and drinking. Inside, Flor's tiny moans had turned into pants and her begging became more and more anguished and sounded much louder. Iván asked what I did, and I gave him the official version. He continued smoking nervously. Flor screamed. Iván raised his head, his jaw quivered. Mauricio said: Shut up, bitch. Iván said: I didn't do anything. I didn't understand. Inside the room, something made of glass fell. Iván said: I went in and took a good look at her, she
couldn't stop crying, I didn't even go near her. I wanted to tell him not to be an idiot, that at the very least he should touch her same as always, tell him not to be a faggot. Inside there was a smack and then Flor screamed again, and then Mauricio grunted: Fucking whore. Iván said: I couldn't do anything, I couldn't even touch her. What’s wrong with me? I told him he could go again after Mauricio. But that wasn't the problem. Iván smoked, staring at the ceiling with his wet cheeks, he could cry in front of me just as I could in front of him, and then there was another scream but this time it wasn't another of Flor's supplicating cries nor one of Mauricio's insults, this time it was the deafening voice of Uncle Jon, who had just come back home, having forgotten his keys or something and having discovered that his son wasn't in his room.

We hissed at Mauricio to come out, but he didn't hear us. I had to go in and get him. He was squatting shirtless on top of her, moving like an octopus and puffing. I shook him: Iván's old man is here, move it. He protested but got up and dressed in an instant. He didn't even look at her, it was like she was a part of the room, like a bedpan. We collected the beer bottles and hid them in the dirty clothes hamper. Mauricio hid his cigarettes and we went downstairs. Iván was already there, and his old man was asking him lots of questions: What were you doing upstairs? Why do you smell like beer? Who’s been smoking? But the worst part was when he turned to Mauricio and grabbed his shirt. Stupified by beer and the situation, at first I didn’t pay attention to what Jon was saying. I had to focus a little to realize that now he was asking something different. What is this? Have you been fighting? What have you been doing? Mauricio didn't know what to say.
Where did this come from, Mauricio? And Mauricio, like years before when we were asked what fucking meant, didn't lift his head, didn't dare speak, just avoided Uncle Jon's gaze while he stretched his neck from his shirt and interrogated him about the origin of that enormous, dark bloodstain.

Now Aunt Mary considers me Iván’s real friend in Peru, she hugs and thanks me for accompanying him all day during the wake, for being with him through the years and the differences. But the Day of Flor wasn't like that. I may as well have been a criminal influence, or something like it. Mothers always believe that their sons are the most innocent and manipulated of their groups, exposed to the terrible education of their monkey friends, God only knows how they were raised. I suppose this is what Aunt Mary thought of me, but it's only speculation. In reality, she didn't say a single word to me. She just called my house and my mom came and picked me up. Mom didn't say much to me either, but since then my appointments with the psychologist doubled and I didn’t sleep over at Iván's anymore. Flor stopped working there, too.

However, the incident occurred only some weeks later, when Mauricio brought cigarettes to school to smoke on the soccer fields. None of us had spoken about the Night of Flor since it happened. In fact, we almost didn't speak to each other at all. Iván hung out more with Mauricio and Mauricio, the imbecile, actually played soccer. I had recently discovered that, in a school of two thousand people, there was no one else I wanted to talk to. Sometimes I tried to spend some time with Iván, but after a few minutes he had something better to do and I never did. Then one day he asked me to stop following him. He started to get better at
physical education. P.E.! We had always hated that class. But Iván and Mauricio now participated all the time and challenged other students to boxing matches. They'd even managed to get the teacher to allow a group of them to set up a tournament without telling the priests, who didn't approve of such things. When I was younger, Iván had trained in a boxing gym that Uncle Jon signed him up for because it was manly. Apparently, the training worked. Iván won the school championship and, for the first time, could rest on his athletic laurels. On top of this, he commanded respect. Around this time I joined the chess team. It was a bit nerdy for a sport, but the members of any team that competed interscholastically were exempt from P.E. on training days. I chose to train every day, as that kept me from having to watch Iván beat heads that could easily have been mine.

The solitude became unbearable for me, but I was a resourceful boy. I discovered that Mauricio and Iván smoked on the soccer field during recesses. And one day, when they arrived at the field, I was already there. Iván didn't seem very happy, but since I had my own cigarettes Mauricio didn't say anything. The silence didn't last long, anyway. Mauricio dedicated himself to talking about women, the subject in which he was most interested. He mentioned the language teacher’s tits—two flying saucers—the history teacher's legs—practically screaming to be fucked—he told how he'd drilled holes in the teacher’s desk in order to see up her skirt, and how he used a mirror on the floor to do it. By the way, our teachers were horrible, but at this point it's not necessary to explain that this wasn't a problem for high school freshmen. Little by little, I turned the conversation to what I was interested in. And what type of woman do you like?
How many have you fucked? And what did you think of Flor? But he didn't want to talk about Flor. Did you really screw her? Without getting sick? Or was the blood from her period? In any case, I don't know if I admire you or feel sorry for you. Mauricio didn't feel comfortable talking about Flor, which was strange to me because he was the kind of person who was comfortable talking about anything with a vagina. He avoided the subject when he could and, finally, said: What's the deal? And I said: I just want you to tell me how you got laid, that's all. Don't you love telling about your adventures? And Mauricio stopped, Go to Hell, and left.

Iván tried to follow him. Are you going after your husband? I asked. What the fuck is your problem? he said, Why are you being an ass? Only the fact that he had spoken to me at all justified everything for me. That was what I wanted, to talk about all these things that one always bears alone. Now it was my turn to speak, to tell him everything that I said, that if he wanted to be friends with Mauricio that was fine but it crushes me that you've decided that we aren't friends anymore, that Mauricio only cares about having someone around who listens to the stories that never really happened to him, that before you didn't care what idiots thought about you, that I don't care what they say, you can tell me crying that you didn't touch Flor if that's what you want.

Iván listened to me in silence, waiting for his turn to speak. And when I shut up, he made use of it. And he told me that I was a bastard, that he would decide what he would do and when he would do it, that I wasn't his wife to come to him with this gayness and I could go to Hell. I didn't stop looking at his eyes while I listened to what he was saying. I thought that he would break, but he
didn't. He told me all of this with his eyes locked on mine in a gesture of hate. I would have spit at him if I could have moved in the middle of the tirade of insults, I would have made him swallow the cigarette butts covered in dirt and cow shit if it were possible. But I couldn’t move. After he spoke we stared at each other fixedly in profound silence. We could have stayed there forever, at least we could have been staring at each other if he hadn't left running. And he had reason to leave. Since we started to look at each other it was clear that we would not be able to agree, since the silence enveloped us so completely I believe that it was obvious to both of us that what would happen would be something we never would have expected and something almost against our will, as if our bodies didn't respond to our brains, almost as if we were watching a movie but not exactly, because in the movies you don't feel the respiration of the characters or the odor of their breath, because in the movies your skin doesn't tremble when your lips make contact with anyone.

After that we didn't speak again. I didn't have much time, anyway. Iván went to Venezuela when he turned fourteen. Uncle Jon had to go. He worked in an insurance company and Sendero Luminoso had sent him death threats in this clean, democratic country in which I had returned to seven years before and that Uncle Jon came back to four years before he died. I didn't even go to Iván’s goodbye party. I told everyone that goodbyes were too painful for me. And I told myself that it wasn't important. I didn't even realize that in reality I hated him for leaving my life one more time and this time forever, to go to a school with new people where he wouldn't need me and no one would need him, to be left to come
back alone only to say goodbye to cadavers.

It's funny how time passes and turns dramas into anecdotes. Yesterday I ended up swapping stories with Iván after all. We left the wake for awhile to eat lunch and we laughed heartily at the memories. He remembered "I don't give a fuck" well. He even tried to introduce the game in Venezuela under the name "I don't give a rat's ass", but there they play baseball and it's not easy or prudent to interfere in the trajectory of those balls, and so that ruined his plan. Yesterday was a good day, even after everything.

But not today. The funeral was much more somber and Aunt Mary looked much more haggard than she had at the wake. I already felt bad before I arrived at the cemetery, but things grew worse during the walk to the grave. Everyone advanced slowly and no one told jokes anymore. On top of that, people supported Aunt Mary's shoulders with their hands in an attempt to give her strength. But she needed much more than that. After throwing earth on the coffin, Aunt Mary took Iván and Toby's hands and spoke to everyone. I suppose that what she said would have seemed pretentious and stupid under any other circumstances, but here it made an impression on me. She insisted that we fight for love, to keep our families united no matter what and to learn, as she did, to have the strength not to collapse before our problems nor to lose the courage to love. That's what she said, "the courage to love". She said that only death could have separated her from Uncle Jon and that's what gave her life meaning. Afterwards she hugged her sons and started a round of Our Father while I looked for a discreet mausoleum to vomit behind.
After the wake I spent the whole day enclosed in Iván's grandmother's basement talking with him about cartoons, American TV shows and books by Stephen King, all of our common interests. It wasn't difficult to laugh a few times. I stayed there even longer than his family and in the afternoon Aunt Mary and Toby came down. We sang old songs from the 80’s and drank lemonade together, as if nobody had died in all of these years. I don't know if I'll see Iván again before he goes back to Venezuela. For now I'm in that dark, drunken place where I go on Saturday nights. Hector Lavoe is playing. Patty moves so well and I never learned to dance.
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Appendix A

Una influencia criminal
de Santiago Roncagliolo
CRECER ES UN OFICIO TRISTE
Santiago Roncaglio-lo

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Índice

La rumbera 13
Lucas y los colores de la nieve 27
Una influencia criminal 43
Un desierto lleno de agua 65
El matrimonio secreto 87
Hospital 105
La trampa 119
Refugio para el amor 127
Vacaciones en el Hyatt 129
Cráneo 145
Una influencia criminal

Tío Jon murió el miércoles. Tía Mary me dio la noticia al día siguiente, justo después de que invité a salir a Patty. No había hablado con tía Mary en ocho años. Estaba destrozada. Según dijo, tío Jon se levantó a las cinco de la mañana con un dolor en el brazo y, minutos después, su corazón se detuvo. Los infartos se anuncian así. Cuando papá se ponía mal, también le dolía el brazo. Papá tiene dos operaciones al corazón y no ha dejado de fumar, ni de beber como un cosaco ni de comer como un vikingo. En cambio, la última vez que vi a tío Jon había dejado el cigarrillo y rebajado más de cuarenta kilos. Y eso que seguía gordo. Era el hombre más gordo que he conocido en mi vida. Una vez, cuando yo tenía como nueve años, lo oí tocando cajón. Digo lo oí pero no lo vi, nada podía verse bajo su cuerpo inmenso y gelatinoso. Esa vez tía Mary tocaba la guitarra y cantaba. Su hijo Iván, mi amigo, tocaba las cucharas. Toby aún estaba muy chiquito para tocar algún instrumento, pero igual correteaba alrededor. Se divertían. Recuerdo que pensé: Qué señor taan inmenso, pero me llamó más la atención que un papá cantara con sus hijos en vez de emborracharse para gritarles lo puta que era su madre. Es irónico que mi papá siga vivo y a tío Jon los cuarenta kilos perdidos sólo le hayan servido para caber en un ataúd estándar.

Ayer por la tarde llegó Iván de Venezuela. No me odia, aunque, pensándolo bien, no tendría por qué odiarme. Cuando recibí la noticia de su llegada pensé suspender la
Crecer es un oficio triste

cita de hoy con Patty pero desistí; no fue fácil conocerrla y, además, este fin de semana necesito relajarme. Es duro ver a un adulto desconocido llamado Iván. Él y yo fuimos los mejores amigos en el colegio desde que una amnistía política permitió a papá volver al Perú. Cuando regresamos, no se me hizo fácil adaptarme a lo que mi familia llamaba «nuestro país». Hasta entonces, según mis documentos mexicanos, yo había vivido en condición de asilado político. Tenía siete años. Todo un peligro público, nos reíamos con papá tiempo después. A veces nos reíamos.

Mi amigo Iván, sin embargo, no tenía nada que ver con esa parte de mí. Al contrario, tío Jon era empresario y detestaba a los rojos. De todos modos, en el colegio papá nunca tuvo mucho contacto con los demás padres de familia. Mejor. Creo que no le habrían gustado. Fue mamá la que conoció a tía Mary durante una entrega de libretas y le pidió que su hijo me buscara. Yo tenía problemas de adaptación porque venía de un colegio mixto, chiquito, inglés y laico. Y había caído en un campo de concentración saturado por dos mil enanos con pretensiones de sementales. Lo peor era que no jugaba fútbol. Eso, ahí, era suficiente para ser poco menos que nadie.

Por suerte éramos dos nadie. Iván se presentó un día a la entrada del colegio y me explicó que su mamá le había dicho que tenía que ser mi amigo. Me fastidió un poco al principio porque ya me había acostumbrado a leer en los recreos. Pero sintonizamos muy rápido. Iván me explicó muchas palabras que yo no entendía. Él tampoco las entendía en realidad, pero sabía que eran insultos y sabía cómo responderlos: si te decían «may», debías decir «tumay» o «tu-vieja-sankokai-vendiendo-chancay-en-la-avenida-Abancay-lavándose-el-culo-con-jabón-Camay». Iván decía que étos eran insultos a la madre, pero no podía explicar más. No sabía a la madre de quién ni por qué había que insultar-
la. Lo que sí sabía era algunos gestos importantes. Si levantaban el dedo medio hacia ti, tú debías hacer un círculo con el pulgar y el índice y meter un dedo por el agujero en dirección al agresor moviéndolo hacia adentro y hacia afuera. Eventualmente, el dedo podía ser reemplazado por un lapi-cero, un cuchillo o una cañita, cualquier cosa servía. Otra palabra clave era «cachar»: si alguien contaba un chiste con el verbo «cachar», tenías que reírte. Iván hasta podía reírse sinceramente de esos chistes, pero tampoco sabía por qué. Le daba risa por costumbre. Recién aprendimos que significaba ese verbo cuando el idiota de Pochito González decidió «cacharse» a la profesora de religión. Se le acercó por atrás mientras repartía exámenes y, aprovechando la confusión, le metió la rodilla en el culo. Cachar no era dar un rodillazo ni un golpe, ni siquiera dolía, sólo se trataba de ponerle la rodilla entre las nalgas. Pero la profesora gritó y salió corriendo de la clase mientras Pochito se reía con otros dos tarados en un rincón y Tito, el delegado de disciplina, lo regañaba porque a la profesora no se la cacha uno, para eso están los compañeros de salón.

No pasaron ni cinco minutos antes de que el psicólogo del área infantil entrase furioso a cuadrar a todo el salón: Así que son muy hombrecitos, ¿ah? Así que ya son grandes y cachan. A ver, pues, ustedes que son tan machitos. ¿Qué es cachar? ¿Qué? ¿Ahora nadie sabe lo que es? Pero sí lo hacen tan bien. ¿O no? Si lo hacen todos los días. ¡Sí se lo hacen los unos a los otros! Todo el salón se puso rojo, miró hacia abajo y guardó silencio. Yo pensé que era una buena manera de callar a la gente, preguntar qué es cachar. Si los profesores querían que nos portáramos bien, podían preguntar todas las mañanas eso. Pero en realidad quería saber la respuesta y me alegré cuando el elegido para darla, obviamente Pochito González, el idiota, se tuvo que poner de pie. ¿Qué pasa, Pocho?, lo provocaba el psicólogo, ¿ya
Crecer es un oficio triste

no te acuerdas? ¡Responde! Y Pocho, que era originalmente cholísimo, casi negro, pero estaba rojo como una albóndiga bañada en ketchup, balbuceó algo que nadie entendió. ¿Qué has dicho?, dijo el psicólogo. ¡Habla fuerte, todos queremos saber! Pero Pocho volvió a balbucear sin despejar la vista del suelo mientras yo me mordía las uñas del suspenso, suplicando mentalmente que subiera el volumen. Finalmente, tras varias órdenes del psicólogo, morado y con las lágrimas asomándose a los párpados, Pocho susurró, de manera que sólo en el silencio sepulcral del salón podía oírsele tenuemente: Hacer el amor. Y en ese momento, miles de conversaciones, gestos, peleas, sermones y hasta lágrimas cobraron sentido para mí y para mi amigo.

Todo eso recordé ayer mientras abrazaba a Iván después de once años. Temía que mostrase algunas resistencias, pero supongo que ya se olvidó del último incidente. O tal vez sencillamente estaba demasiado preocupado por su familia. Su papá estaba en el medio del salón entre cuatro antorchas artificiales y tía Mary al lado, con la cara arrasada por las lágrimas. Ella ha vivido sólo para su familia, mi mamá siempre decía que le había aguantado muchas cosas a su marido. Yo sospechaba que mamá hablaba de infidelidades, pero no se me ocurría que un tipo tan gordo pudiese tener una amante. Si se le llega a echar encima la mata, pensaba yo. Tardé mucho en entender que tener una amante no es cuestión de talla sino de pendejada, y que lo de la posición es cuestión de inventiva. Por eso le preguntaba a mi mamá qué cosas le aguantaba tía Mary y mi mamá respondía: De todo, hijito, de todo. Yo nunca entendía qué cuernos era todo. Sospechaba que podían ser golpes, porque tía Mary era muy católica y mamá también era muy católica en la época en que papá la golpeaba. Lo recuerdo porque mi hermana y yo teníamos que sufrirlo todo con ella, los sábados veíamos a papá pegarle y los domingos íbamos a aburrirnos
Una influencia criminal

a misa. Pero nunca llegué a entender qué le aguantaba tía Mary a tío Jon. Ahora que le doy vueltas a esos tiempos, noto que no entendía nada de nada. Y ayer, frente a la caja que guardaba a tío Jon, surgieron nuevas cosas para no entender. Después de unos años, uno cree que ya lo sabe todo y que no necesita aprender más. Cierra la mente como un bar al amanecer. Pero la realidad siempre acaba abriendo a patadas la puerta. Ayer muchas imágenes se sacudieron el polvo en mi memoria y yo traté con todas mis fuerzas de ahuyentarlas pensando en el culo pequeño y ansioso de Patty, tan cercano ahora.

Pero no tenía mucho sentido. El pasado era más fuerte que el culo y me estallaba en la cabeza sin piedad. Después de un rato en el velorio, un cura amigo de la familia pronunció una breve liturgia para los que estábamos ahí. En su último año de vida, tío Jon se había acercado mucho a la Iglesia, siempre con devoto entusiasmo, según el cura. Colaboraba con la parroquia trabajando en sus ratos libres, que eran muchos porque desde su regreso de Venezuela no había conseguido trabajo. A tía Mary se le hacía pesado tener que mantener la casa con su sueldo de profesora de inglés, pero por suerte Iván se quedó está estudiando en una universidad estatal casi gratuita en un pueblo de la costa, donde con cualquier medio tiempo se ganaba la vida porque no hay nada de qué gastar. Iván sabía todas las canciones bobas de la liturgia. Ésa era una de las diferencias que descubrimos mientras nos reconocíamos: él estudió en un colegio del Opus Dei y yo me quedé en el colegio jesuita hasta el final. Iván se inclinó por la medicina en un país de enfermedades tropicales y yo por la literatura en un país sin lectores. Iván lleva una vida apacible y pueblerina con su novia de siempre, y a mí las novias no me duran ni dos meses. Iván no fuma ni bebe y yo le llevé marihuana al velorio pensando que lo relajaría. Por supuesto que al final
Crecer es un oficio triste

ni se la ofrecí, la hierba aún espera en mi bolsillo a que alguien le haga caso. Pero no sé si sea el momento tampoco ahora. Esto ya no es tan divertido como solía ser. Nada lo es. Ni siquiera lo ha sido salir finalmente con Patty, que quería ir a un sitio de vinos donde pedimos una botella que acabó costando como treinta dólares y nos desbancó.

La primera vez que bebí fue también con Iván, cuando teníamos unos diez años. Él se había quedado a dormir en la casa y nos habíamos despertado temprano. En la sala, una botella de whisky medio llena formaba parte de los escombros de la última borrachera de papá. Yo dije que siempre bebía, y que si por la noche había escuchado mucho ruido éramos papá, sus amigos y yo que estábamos de fiesta. Y para demostrarle lo macho que era, le di un largo trago a la botella y puse cara de costumbre, aunque por dentro sentía que había tomado ácido muriático. Iván preguntó si era rico el whisky. Como yo dije que sí, él dio otro trago igual y puso cara de comer fuego. Luego preguntó si ya estábamos borrachos. Yo le dije Creo que no, y tomé más. Para cuando papá se levantó, como a las once de la mañana, Iván ya había vomitado la comida de tres días y yo me había quedado dormido de nuevo. Luego, los tres acordamos que el asunto no saldría de ahí y desayunamos, pero papá se confundió y le echó sal en vez de azúcar a la leche, y el pobre Iván volvió a vomitar. Yo no pude evitarlo y me cagué de risa.

Nos reíamos mucho, en realidad, sobre todo cuando jugábamos «a mí qué chucha», un juego genial que inventamos de casualidad. Consistía en entrar corriendo a la cancha de fulbito durante los partidos y patear la pelota con todas nuestras fuerzas lo más lejos posible. Cuando nuestros compañeros protestaban, nosotros gritábamos «a mí qué chucha, a mí qué chucha» y corríamos. No entiendo cómo nadie nos partió la cara por eso. Supongo que nos
Una influencia criminal

tenían cierta compasión porque Iván y yo éramos los que siempre se quedaban al final cuando los capitanes escogían equipo. Nos escogían en «dos por uno», o, si los equipos ya estaban parejos, nos dejaban fuera o nos relegaban a la categoría de parías «al gol». Y aunque entráramos a la cancha, nadie nos pasaba la bola jamás. Por eso, «a mí qué chucha» era más que un juego, era una actitud, una rebelión con causa, una forma de vida. Tía Mary sabía eso, por eso me llamó a mí y no llamó a Mauricio para que recibiera a Iván, para que lo acompañara durante el velorio en el desfile interminable de toda esa gente de su sangre y de su vida que ya no significaba para él nada más que un pasaporte en el fondo de un cajón. Los peruanos parecen vivir con una estaca atravesada en el hígado, dijo en un momento Iván. Ni le pregunté si había pensado en volver. Cuando dijo «los peruanos» sonó como si hubiese dicho «los somálies» o «los mohicanos», esos extranjeros de un país tan remoto en el tiempo y el cariño.

Después de la liturgia fuimos a la casa de los abuelos de Iván. Sus papás vivían en el sótano y Toby dormía en un cuarto arriba. Era una casa grande, pero no tan bonita como la que tenían antes en San Isidro, donde Iván y yo hojeábamos en secreto las revistas porno de tío Jon. Desde que encontramos esas revistas por casualidad, nuestras vidas nunca volvieron a ser las mismas. Empezamos a hacer las tareas en su casa y también nos íbamos a jugar ahí y yo me quedaba a dormir, en fin, me quedaba con cualquier pretexto para verlas. Preferíamos las Hustler, que eran las más atrevidas y no sólo tenían calatas, sino también polvos. También eran las que tenían más páginas pegadas, pero eso era manejable. Escogíamos las mejores y nos turnábamos para ir al baño a correrlos. Yo nunca me la corrí ahí, en realidad. El baño no tenía pestillo y yo estaba aterrado de que alguien me encontrase. Me limitaba a esconder la revis-
Crecer es un oficio triste
ta bajo la alfombrilla del vástago y sentarme a hacer tiempo.
Luego, como sólo podía correrme en mi casa y a solas, le
pedía las revistas prestadas a Iván. Él decía que sólo podía
prestarme las del fondo del cajón, y eso con mucho cuidado
de dejarlas todas en el milimetro exacto en que estaban
para que su padre no notara su falta. Un día me llevé una
de las revistas escondida bajo la camisa y, para mala suerte,
me encontré en la puerta con tío Jon, que me pidió que lo
ayudase a cargar unas cajas desde el carro. Fueron diez
minutos de pavor, cargando las cajas pegadas al pecho y
sintiendo que se me iba a desbaratar la revista en la cara de
tío Jon y tía Mary iba a hacer un escándalo y tío Jon me iba
a sacar de una patada. Al final no se dieron cuenta. Pero
desde entonces no quise meterme más al baño, ni siquiera a
fingir que me la corría.

El hallazgo de las revistas nos permitió sentirnos mejor
con nosotros mismos también porque, con el pasar de los
años, nuestras conversaciones y paseos alrededor de la
pareja de maricones más persistente del colegio. Al prin-
cipio no importaba. Éramos amigos y el resto del mundo
podía pasarse sus comentarios por el culo. Cuando papá
hacía alguna burrada borracho, yo le contaba a Iván al día
siguiente. Más de una vez lloré frente a él porque sabía que
podía. Pero, con el tiempo, empezamos a tener una imagen
que mantener. Ya éramos grandes, teníamos trece años.
Hablar de las revistas de su papá siempre nos daba buena
reputación. Iván hasta invitó a Mauricio a que las viera un
día, y Mauricio era del grupo de los más bacanes de la
clase. Luego, cuando yo encontré las revistas de mi propio
papá, también compartí mi hallazgo.

Debo haber empezado a interesarme por la ficción en esa
epoca, porque descubrí que podía inventar historias eróti-
cas convincentes para chicos. Como la de esa chica mayor
Una influencia criminal

de catorce años con la que jugué «botella borracha». Y cuando me tocó con ella, sus amigos nos metieron a un cuarto y nos besamos en la cama y yo creo —así dije, creo— que en un momento se le ha movido el calzón, y yo tenía un pantalón corto como muy amplio por el cual se me podía salir la trola, y estoy seguro de que, al menos un ratito, se metió ahí, o sea que tal vez ya no soy virgen. O la del día en que me quedé encerrado en el baño de mi prima y ella se empezó a cambiar en su cuarto y yo la veía por el ojo de la cerradura. Tenía muchas historias y todos las creían, al menos las querían creer. Iván entendió rápido que mentía y aprendió muy pronto a inventar sus propias historias.

Pero alguna vez sí tuvimos una historia cierta, por lo menos más o menos cierta. La historia de Flor. Por esa época mis papás se acababan de separar. Dadas las circunstancias, además de meterme a un psicólogo que no me dejaba jugar las tardes de los viernes, mamá consideró que yo necesitaba mucho a mis amigos. Como sólo tenía uno, decidió que debía verlo la mayor cantidad de tiempo posible. Empecé a quedarme en casa de Iván al menos una noche por semana, y sus papás empezaron a aprovechar esas noches para salir, así que solíamos pasar la noche a solas con Flor, una chica recién bajada de Abancay que trabajaba en la casa. Claro que no era bonita, ni simpática, era gorda como un tamal y no hablaba español bien. Ni dientes tenía. Pero tenía lo más importante: era una mujer biológicamente completa. Todo lo que necesitábamos.

Empezamos sólo con miradas. Primero discretas y huidizas, después más francas. Flor ni siquiera se daba cuenta de que la observábamos con hilos de baba resbalando por nuestras barbillas. Un día le dije Qué bonita estás, Flor, y ella siguió de largo. Otro día, Iván le llevó un ramo de flores robadas del parque y ella las puso en un florero en la sala. Ni gracias dijo. En general, o era tan cojuda que no
Crecer es un oficio triste

etendía nada o le era completamente indiferente nuestra existencia y la suya propia. Poco a poco empezamos a incrementar el acoso sin saber si a ella le molestaba, le gustaba o le daba igual. Simplemente, no había ninguna reacción de su parte. Tras una reunión estratégica, Iván y yo tomamos una decisión: seguir adelante, pero dejarnos de piropos y mariconadas de éas.

Nuestro acercamiento se aceleró desde entonces. La siguiente noche que me quedé bajamos en pijama a la cocina. Flor dejaba lista la mesa para el desayuno del día siguiente. Flor, le pregunté, ¿quieres ser mi novia? ¿Qué dice, niño?, dijo ella tratando de salir. Yo le obstruí el paso. Que si quieres ser mi novia, Flor, que me gustas mucho. No me fastidie, niño, ya me voy a dormir, dijo. Le pregunté si quería dormir sola. Atrás mío, Iván se reía en silencio. Cuando Flor se callaba, Iván decía: Respóndele al joven, que a las visitas hay que tratarlas bien. Creo que en ese momento, por primera vez, Flor entendió de qué le estábamos hablando. Bajó la cabeza y trató de salir, pero mi brazo estaba inamovible frente a ella. Si quieres pasar, vas a tener que pagar peaje, Flor. Y Flor preguntó qué cosa, no entendía, mientras Iván miraba comiendo galletas que tía Mary había horneado esa tarde. Flor seguro quiso decirle que esas galletas eran para una reunión de su mamá, niño, pero tenía problemas más urgentes que resolver, como yo. Dijo Permiso, joven, y esta vez empujó un poco mi brazo. La dejé pasar pero le metí la mano al culo. Ella se fue fastidiada sin decir nada. ¿Por qué te haces la que no te gustó?, alcancé a decirle. Iván se rió y nos fuimos a dormir por ese día sintiéndonos muy hombres.

En adelante, el hostigamiento a Flor se convirtió en nuestro pasatiempo favorito. Cada vez que los papás de Iván no veían, nuestras manos paseaban por todo el cuerpo de Flor rápidamente y nuestras caras se volvían máscaras de
Una influencia criminal

«yo soy un santo». Siempre he bailado muy mal, y hoy cuando Patty quiso ir a bailar tuve que disimular mi fastidio. Pero cuando los tíos no estaban en casa, yo le pedía a Flor que bailáramos y la manoseaba hasta donde podía. ¡Niño, no moleste!, se quejaba sin éxito. Niño, suéltame, pero yo le decía que era mi novia y que nos íbamos a casar, que yo la iba a llevar a conocer a mi familia, y no sé si ella me creía o en realidad era tan idiota que no entendía lo que pasaba. A veces, si uno no molestaba demasiado, era tan dócil que en realidad parecía que le gustáramos.

Un día se quejó. Fue donde tía Mary y le dijo que su hijo estaba que la fastidiaba y la tocaba. A tío Jon le dio risa el incidente: Aguántense la arrechura, nos dijo, si Flor es más fea que una patada en los huevos. Pero tía Mary sí nos advirtió que nos quedáramos tranquilos o iba a tener que suspender mis quedadas para dormir. Sospecho que su preocupación principal no era el respeto a la empleada, sino que su hijo ya tuviese el desarrollo lo suficientemente avanzado para embarazarle a la chola. No lo tenía, ni él ni yo. Envidiábamos a nuestros compañeros que ya criaban vello en las axilas. Algunos ya hasta se afeitaban. Yo algunas veces trataba de poner una voz más grave para apantallar, pero eso a todo el mundo le daba risa. Lejos de preocuparnos, sin embargo, nuestro atraso hormonal era un estímulo. Yo había leído que el líquido que botábamos cuando nos la corriamos no era semen fértil, así que si nos tirábamos a Flor, no la dejaríamos embarazada: Agüita de coco, Iván, pura agüita de coco, no corremos ningún riesgo. Iván meditaba nuestras posibilidades de chifarnos a la empleada entre risas y bromas. Por lo general, empezábamos a imaginarnos escenas absurdas como que el olor de la axila de Flor nos mataba antes de quitarle la ropa, o que no podíamos metér-sela porque había telarañas obstruyendo el paso. Entre fantasías, carcajadas y almohadazos terminábamos durmién-
Crecer es un oficio triste

donos sin planear nada en serio. Esa situación duró un par
de meses, de seguir metiendo mano a una Flor resignada,
acostumbrada y más aburrida que ofendida por nuestra
conducta. Hasta que un día, mientras yo la toqueteaba en
la cocina, Flor me empujó contra la despensa y me gritó
¡No me tocast!, así de mal conjugado, no me tocas, dijo. Me
puso furioso su empujón. ¿Quién se había creído? Ahora sí
te jodiste, chola, le dije, ahora sí te has ganado el premio
mayor, te voy a violar. Flor balbuceó algo, pero ahora Iván
estaba tras ella y no podía escaparse con facilidad. Empeza-
mos a asustarla: Te vamos a arrancar la ropa y te la vamos
to meter por todos los huecos hasta que chilles. Ella trató de
zafarse y yo la agarré de la cintura. Iván se quitó el cintu-
rón. Ella manoteó un poco en el aire. Tranquila, Flor, ¿no
somos novios? ¿Por qué te resistes? La empujé contra la
refri y me pareció frente a ella, tan cerca que sentía su olor a
haber picado cebolla. Le toqué el pecho. Ella no se resistió
esta vez, sólo me miró a los ojos. Nunca supe qué quería
decir esa mirada, porque inmediatamente oímos la voz de
tío Jon desde la puerta: Hola, familia.

Ayer que tío Jon era un bulto amarillo relleno de algo-
dón, se me hacía difícil creer que tuviese en vida una voz
tan estruendosa. Todo parecía temblar cuando gritaba. En
realidad, todo parecía temblar incluso cuando simplemente
caminaba. Pero, a pesar de que era bastante patán para
algunas cosas, tenía cierta inocencia de niño y un optimis-
mo a prueba de balas. Recuerdo que la última vez que nos
encontramos me habló de su interés por acogerse al plan de
repatriación de Croacia. Tío Jon jamás había estado ahí,
pero su abuelo era yugoslavo, y hasta la tercera generación
de sus descendientes podía instalarse en el país con benefi-
cios tributarios y empleo asegurado en la reconstrucción de
posguerra. Creo que si no acabaron en Europa del Este fue
sólo porque tía Mary se puso fuerte para que al menos
aprendieran croata antes de ir. Nunca lo hicieron, pero tío Jon ya se había comunicado, vía Internet, con una dudosa familia suya que vivía en Bosnia desde los años sesenta. Hasta habían intercambiado fotos y programado una cena típica para el encuentro.

Con todo lo bonachón que era para ciertas cosas, si tío Jon se llegaba a enojar podía ser un poco salvaje. Iván llegó una vez al colegio con el cuello aún rojo de un manazo, que creo que ni siquiera era de enojo sino de cariño. Y creo que su mal humor era una de las cosas que mamá decía que tía Mary tenía que aguantar, sobre todo al final, cuando no tenía trabajo y se quedaba en casa todo el día y rechazaba las ofertas que no le parecían «a su altura» (o sea, todas) y podía ponerse un poco violento si se le insistía. Por eso, cuando entró a la casa, desistimos de continuar fastidiando a Flor. Pero su entrada también nos fue útil, porque finalmente nos animamos al gran plan para la próxima vez que los tíos no estuvieran en casa.

La oportunidad llegó dos semanas después: cumpleaños de un hermano de tía Mary. Eso era una larga fiesta segura. Iván dijo en casa que no quería ir, que prefería quedarse jugando porque se aburría entre tanto viejo. Los tíos comprendieron, ellos eran muy comprensivos y no pusieron peros. Hasta invitamos a Mauricio para que se uniera a la pandilla basura, gran chico ese Mauricio, tan educadito, decía tía Mary, la pobre incauta. El educadito llegó con dos cajetillas de cigarros y, cuando los tíos se fueron, fue a comprar cervezas «para mi papá, señora». Se las vendieron sin problemas y las llevó a la casa en bolsas del mercado por si algún vecino lo descubría. Cuando volvió, subimos a la azotea, donde estaba el cuarto de servicio, y abrimos las botellas entre las sábanas y la ropa interior puestas a secar. La cerveza era más suave que el whisky, más fácil de tomar. Y teníamos cuatro botellas grandes. Aun si todo eso no nos
Crecer es un oficio triste

mareaba lo suficiente, los cigarros se encargarían de potenciarlo. Y lo más importante, teníamos a Flor. Jugamos fumanchú para decidir en qué orden íbamos y yo gané. Hicimos salud y yo me vacié un vaso entero en la garganta, apagué mi cigarrillo contra el suelo y entré.

Oscuro como una cueva, el cuarto de Flor sólo dejaba ver la silueta de su ocupante sentada en la cama. La penumbra no permitía ver sus ojos, lo cual era un alivio. Sólo dejaba ver el hult en medio de la cama, casi un costal de arroz sentado. Sé que me estás esperando, Flor, ya llegó tu novio, pero ella no se movía ni decía nada, No tengas miedo, no te voy a hacer daño, sólo quiero darte un abrazo, y ella se arrimaba hacia la pared huyendo como un animalito. ¿Adónde vas?, y ella se pegaba a la pared y decía: ¿Qué quiere, niño? Qué quiere, niño, como si no lo supieras, como si tú no lo quisieras. ¿Por qué, mamita? ¿No somos novios, acaso? Ella no llegó a responder. Salté hacia su cuerpo y empecé a tocarla. Ella me quiso empujar. Era mayor que yo pero yo era más fuerte y la eché pegando sus brazos contra la cama, pegando mi cuerpo contra su cuerpo. Ella ni siquiera olía bien, pero yo le pasé las manos por el culo y por las tetas hasta que me cansé de tener que sacarle la mano cada vez que quería llegar a algún punto clave. Gemía, pero ni siquiera gritaba, sólo trataba de zafarse. A los diez minutos calculé que ya había estado dentro suficiente tiempo para salir con la frente en alto y me fui. Sé que somos novios, le dije al salir, pero también tengo que pensar en mis amigos, y ahora te voy a compartir con ellos.

Salí entre las risas y los brindis de Mauricio e Iván, que entró inmediatamente después. Mientras oíamos los sollozos apagados de Flor, Mauricio me interrogaba, ¿Te la tiraste?, y yo respondía que no, que me daba asco tirárme-la, pero Mauricio opinaba que eso ni importaba, que hem-
bra es hembra y para eso está, y que más bien poder tirar y no hacerlo es señal de mariconada. Yo ya no pude cambiar mi versión, pero exageré mis manoseos todo lo posible para su deleite y mi reputación.

Cuando salió Iván se repitió el interrogatorio. Él también se había limitado al manoseo y a él también le reprimió Mauricio su inoperancia. Yo trataba de imaginarme cómo sería tirársela si era tan difícil simplemente manosearla contra sus esfuerzos por zafarse. Y dije: Si tanto hablas, anda y tirátela tú, total yo también había hablado de eso con Iván varias noches y a la hora de la hora me había echado para atrás. No era malo dejar de tirársela. Era higiénico. Pero Mauricio no pensaba así. Terminó su trago y le pasó su cigarro a Iván. Luego entró como entran los toreros a la arena. Sólo faltaba la música triunfal. Iván y yo nos sentamos en silencio a fumar y beber. Adentro, los gemiditos de Flor se iban convirtiendo en jadeos y sus súplicas denotaban cada vez más angustia y sonaban más fuerte. Iván preguntó qué había hecho yo, y le conté la versión oficial. Él siguió fumando nerviosamente. Flor gritó. Iván levantó la vista. Le temblaba la mandíbula. Mauricio dijo: Cállate, mierda. Iván dijo: No hice nada. Yo no entendí. Dentro del cuarto, algo de vidrio se cayó. Iván dijo: Entré y me la quedé mirando, no paraba de llorar, ni siquiera me acerqué. Yo quería decirle que no fuera idiota, que al menos la toqueteara como todos, que no fuera maricón. Adentro se oyó un golpe y otro grito de Flor, y luego Mauricio gruñó: Puta de mierda. Iván dijo: No pude hacer nada, no pude ni tocarla. ¿Qué me pasa? Y yo le dije que volviera después de Mauricio, pero ése no era el problema. Iván fumaba mirando al cielo con las mejillas mojadas, él podía llorar delante de mí, igual que yo podía delante de él, y luego otro grito, pero esta vez no era el llanto de súplica de Flor ni el insulto de Mauricio, esta vez era la atronadora voz de tío Jon, que había vuelto a la casa,
Crecer es un oficio triste

habría olvido las llaves o algo, y había descubierto que su hijo no estaba en su cuarto.

Susurrámos a gritos a Mauricio que saliera, pero él no oía nada. Tuve que entrar a sacarlo. Estaba echado sin camisa encima de ella moviéndose como un pulpo y bufando. Lo jalé: Ahí está el viejo de Iván, muévete. Protestó pero se levantó y vistió en un instante. A ella ni la miré, era como una parte del cuarto, como una escupidera. Recogimos las botellas y las escondimos en la canasta de ropa sucia. Mauricio se guardó los cigarros y bajamos. Iván ya estaba ahí, y su viejo hacía muchas preguntas: ¿Qué hacían arriba? ¿Por qué hueles a cerveza? ¿Quién ha estado fumando? Pero la peor de todas fue cuando miró a Mauricio y lo tomó de la camisa. Atontado por la cerveza y la situación, al principio no presté atención a lo que tío Jon decía. Tuve que enfocar un poco para descubrir que lo que estaba preguntando ahora era diferente. ¿Qué es esto? ¿Han estado peleando? ¿Qué has estado haciendo? Mauricio no sabía qué decir. ¿De dónde ha salido esto, Mauricio? Y Mauricio, como años antes cuando nos preguntaron qué era cachar, no levantaba la cabeza, no se atrevía a hablar, sólo eludía la mirada de tío Jon mientras él jaloneaba el cuello de su camisa y lo interrogaba por el origen de esa enorme y oscura mancha de sangre.

Ahora tía Mary me considera el amigo de Iván en el Perú, me abraza y me agradece que lo acompañe durante todo el día en el velorio, que esté con él a pesar de los años y las diferencias. Pero el día de Flor no fue así. Yo debía ser una influencia criminal o algo por el estilo. Las madres siempre creen que sus hijos son los más inocentes y manipulables de sus grupos, expuestos a la pésima educación de los monos de sus amigos, que sabe Dios en qué ambiente se habrán criado. Supongo que eso debe haber pensado tía Mary de mí, pero es sólo una especulación. En realidad, no me dijo ni una palabra. Sólo llamó a mi casa y mamá me
pasó a recoger. Mamá tampoco me dijo gran cosa, pero a partir de entonces se duplicarán mis horas semanales de psicólogo y no me quedé a dormir más donde Iván. Flor también dejó de trabajar ahí.

Sin embargo, el incidente recién ocurrió unas semanas más tarde, cuando Mauricio llevó cigarrillos al colegio para fumarlos en las canchas de fútbol. Ninguno de nosotros había hablado sobre la noche de Flor desde que ocurrió. De hecho, casi ni siquiera habíamos hablado. Iván andaba ahora más con Mauricio y el imbécil de Mauricio sí jugaba fútbol. Yo había descubierto que en el colegio, de dos mil personas, no había nadie más con quien hablar. Alguna vez había tratado de pasar el rato con Iván, pero tras unos minutos él siempre tenía algo mejor que hacer y yo no. Un día hasta me pidió que dejara de seguirlo. Empezó a mejorar en educación física. ¡Educación física! Siempre habíamos odiado ese curso. Pero Iván y Mauricio ahora participaban todo el tiempo y pedían competencias de lucha y box. Incluso lograron que el profesor permitiera a un grupo armar un pequeño torneo sin decírselo a los curas, que no aprobaran esas cosas. Cuando era más chico, Iván había entrenado en un gimnasio de boxeadores en el que lo inscribió tío Jon porque era para machos. Aparentemente, el entrenamiento funcionó. Iván ganó el campeonato del colegio y, por primera vez, pudo lucir un laureo deportivo. Y para colmo, uno que imponía respeto. Durante ese tiempo yo me inscribí en la selección de ajedrez. Era un poco nerd como deporte, pero los miembros de cualquier equipo de competencia interescolar quedaban exonerados de la clase de educación física los días de entrenamiento. Yo aducía entrenamiento todos los días, y así me libraba de ver a Iván golpeando cabezas que podrían ser la mía.

La soledad se volvió insoportable para mí, pero era un chico de recursos. Descubrí que Mauricio e Iván fumaban en
Crecer es un oficio triste

da la cancha de fútbol durante los recreos. Y un día, cuando llegaron a la cancha, yo ya estaba ahí. Iván no pareció muy contento, pero como yo tenía mis propios cigarrillos, Mauricio no dijo nada. El silencio no duró mucho, de todos modos. Mauricio se dedicó a hablar de mujeres, el tema en que mejor se desenvolvía. Mencionó las tetas de la profesora de lenguaje —dos platillos voladores—, las piernas de la de historia —está que pide hueve a gritos—, contó que había perforado el escritorio de los profesores para poder verles el calzón a las de falda, y que para el mismo fin usaba un espejo en el suelo. Nuestras profesoras, por cierto, eran horribles, pero ya no es necesario explicar que eso no era un problema en los inicios de la secundaria. Poco a poco, yo iba llevando la conversación al tema que me interesaba: ¿Y qué tipo de mujer te gusta? ¿Y cuántas te has cachado? ¿Y qué te pareció Flor? Pero de Flor, él no quería hablar. ¿En realidad te la tiraste? ¿Sin asco? ¿O la sangre era de su regla? En cualquier caso, no sé si admirarte o compadecerte. Mauricio no se sentía cómodo hablando de Flor, lo cual me extrañaba porque era el tipo de persona que se sentía cómoda hablando de cualquier cosa con vagina. Evitó el tema cuanto pudo y, finalmente, dijo: ¿Qué pasa? Yo le dije: Quiero que me cuentes tu polvo, eso es todo. ¿No te encanta contar tus aventuras? Y Mauricio se paró, Vete a la mierda, y se fue. Iván trató de seguirlo. ¿Vas atrás de tu marido?, le pregunté. ¿Qué chucha te pasa?, me dijo, ¿por qué jodes?, sólo el hecho de que me hubiera hablado ya justificaba para mí todo. Eso era lo que yo quería, hablar de todas esas cosas que uno siempre se traga. Ahora era mi turno de hablar, de decirle todo lo que dije, que si quieres ser amigo de Mauricio está bien pero me revienta que decidas que tú y yo ya no lo somos, que a Mauricio lo único que le importa es alguien que escuche los polvos que no tiene, que antes no te importaba lo que pensaran de ti los idiotas, que a mí no me
Una influencia criminal

importa lo que digan, tú puedes decírmelo llorando que no tocaste a Flor si eso es lo que quieras.

Iván me escuchó en silencio, esperando su oportunidad de hablar. Y cuando me callé, la aproveché. Y me dijo que yo era un huevón, que él iba a decidir qué hacía y cuándo lo hacía, que yo no era su esposa para venirle con esas mariconadas y que me podía ir a la mierda. Yo no dejé de mirarlo a los ojos mientras oía lo que decía. Pensé que se quebraría, pero no lo hizo. Me dijo todo con la mirada clavada en la mía en un gesto de odio. Yo le habría escupido de haber podido moverme en medio de la andanada de insultos, le habría hecho tragar las colillas con tierra y mierda de vaca de ser posible. Para mí no era posible ni moverme. Después de que habló nos miramos fija y profundamente en silencio. Podríamos habernos quedado ahí para siempre, aún podríamos estar ahí mirándonos si él no se hubiera largado corriendo. Y tenía razón en largarse. Desde que empezamos a mirarnos estaba claro que el asunto ya no era ponerlos de acuerdo, desde que el silencio nos envolvió de esa manera creo que fue obvio para los dos que pasaría lo que nunca habíamos esperado y que pasaría casi contra nuestra voluntad, como si nuestros cuerpos no respondieran a nuestra cabeza, casi como si lo viéramos en una película pero no exactamente, porque en las películas no sientes la respiración de los protagonistas ni el olor de su aliento, porque en las películas no se te estremece la piel al contacto con los labios de nadie.

Después de eso ni siquiera volvimos a hablar. Ya no quedaba mucho tiempo, de todos modos. Iván se fue a Venezuela cuando cumplimos catorce años. Tío Jon tenía que irse. Trabajaba en una compañía de seguridad y Sendero Luminoso lo tenía amenazado de muerte en ese país lindo y democrático al que yo había vuelto siete años antes y al que el tío volvería cuatro años antes de morir. A la despedida de
Crecer es un oficio triste

Iván, ni siquiera asistí. Dije a los demás que los adiós me daban pena. Y me dije a mí mismo que no me importaba. No tenía cómo saber que en realidad lo odiaba por largarse de mi vida una vez más y esta vez para siempre, por ir a un colegio con gente nueva en el que no me necesitaría a mí y nadie a él, por estar dispuesto a volver sólo para despedir a los cadáveres.

Es gracioso cómo el tiempo pasa y convierte los dramas en anécdotas. Ayer volvimos a tener historias con Iván, después de todo. Dejamos el velorio un rato para ir a almorzar y logramos reírnos a carcajadas con los recuerdos. Él se acordaba bien de «a mí qué chucha». Incluso trató de introducir el juego en Venezuela con el nombre de «a mí qué coño», pero ahí se juega béisbol y no es fácil ni prudente interferir en la trayectoria de una pelota de esas, así que se le frustró el plan. Ayer fue un buen día, al fin y al cabo.

Pero no hoy. El funeral era bastante más sombrío y tía Mary se veía bastante más ojerosa que en el velorio. Yo ya me sentía mal mucho antes de llegar al cementerio. Pero la cosa empezó durante el camino al foso. Todo el mundo avanzaba lentamente y nadie contaba chistes ya. Más bien la gente apoyaba sus manos en los hombros de tía Mary tratando de transmitirle fuerza. Pero ella necesitaba mucho más que eso. Después de echar tierra al ataúd, tía Mary tomó de las manos a Iván y Toby y nos habló a todos. Supongo que lo que dijo me habría parecido cursi y estúpido en cualquier circunstancia, pero ahí me sacudió. Nos instó a pelear por el amor, a mantener unidas nuestras familias a pesar de todo y a aprender, como ella, a tener coraje para no desplomarnos ante los problemas ni perder el valor de amar. Así lo dijo: «el valor de amar». Dijo que sólo la muerte podría haberla separado de tío Jon y que eso era lo que daba sentido a su vida. Después abrazó a sus hijos y...
empezó a rezar un padrenuestro mientras yo buscaba un mausoleo discreto para vomitar.

Después del velorio me pasé todo el día encerrado en el sótano de la abuela de Iván conversando con él de dibujos animados, series americanas y libros de Stephen King, toda nuestra cultura en común. No nos fue difícil reírnos varias veces. Yo me quedé en la casa aún más que su familia y durante la tarde bajaron tía Mary y Toby. Acabamos cantando viejas canciones ochenteras y bebiendo limonada juntos, como si nadie se hubiera muerto en todos estos años. No sé si volveré a ver a Iván antes de que vuelva a Venezuela. Por ahora estoy en este lugar oscuro y ebrio al que vengo los sábados. Está sonando Héctor Lavoe. Patty se mueve muy bien y yo nunca he sabido bailar.
Capstone Summary

This project is a complete translation of the short story, "Una influencia criminal" [A Criminal Influence] by Peruvian writer Santiago Roncagliolo, from the collection of short stories by the same author titled Crecer es un oficio triste [Growing up is Sad Business]. The accompanying paper involves a description of several literary movements to which Roncagliolo belongs, as well as an assessment of why "Una influencia criminal" pertains to these movements.

Santiago Roncagliolo is the youngest writer ever to have won El Premio Alfaguara, for his novel Abril Rojo [Red April]. He is the author of multiple novels, a play and several books for children. His novel Pudor [Prudishness] has been adapted as a movie in Spain. He currently lives in Barcelona, Spain.

Globalization is fundamentally an economic subject dealing with the increased movement of goods and funds around the world and the resulting impact on global economy and workforce. However, the effects of globalization are seen in many other fields of study as well. Through translation, literature can move across cultures and borders, allowing readers to be exposed to the author’s culture in new ways. As in the case of Santiago Roncagliolo, authors themselves can be products of several cultures as growth and improvements in international business and travel make it increasingly easier for people to uproot and settle in a new country. An author brings his or her cultural experiences into their writing and translation brings those experiences to new audiences.

Although Santiago Roncagliolo is well known in South America and his novel Abril Rojo [Red April] has been translated into several languages, many of
his other works have not been circulated outside of the Spanish-speaking world. With the translation of one of his short stories into English, English-speaking audiences can be exposed to literature they might not have heard of otherwise. Roncagliolo represents a more recent trend in Spanish-speaking literature that has not been recognized as widely as the after-effects of magical realism, which is the classic genre made globally famous by authors like Gabriel García Márquez and carried on by the following generation of authors such as Isabel Allende. The current generation of Latin American youth, classified generally as those who grew up in the 90’s, have literature movements of their own which are in part an intentional rebellion against magical realism; a style they shun as quaint, rural and outdated as they seek to create literature that more accurately reflects modern urban life in Latin America. Considering the widespread use of technology and the influence of globalization, modern urban life in Latin America is the same as modern urban life just about everywhere else in the world, assuming the youth in question have the socioeconomic status to afford the lifestyle.

The literary movements discussed are known as Generation X and McOndo. McOndo is the title of a short story anthology edited by Sergio Gómez and Alberto Fuguet. The title is significant in that it is a derivative of the word "Macondo", a fictional village which serves as the setting for Gabriel García Márquez's famous, traditional Latin American novel Cien años de soledad [One Hundred Years of Solitude]. The deletion of the A and the capitalization of the O are a direct reference to the restaurant McDonald's, which itself can be seen as a representation of capitalism and globalism today. Stories in McOndo have themes
focusing on the realities of urban youth culture today, specifically sex, violence, identity crisis and a disconnect from reality. Generation X refers initially to the novel by North American writer Douglas Coupland titled *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. This book focuses on the apathy and violence of a generation of North American youth in the 80’s, but the themes of the novel are themes common across literature in both the 80’s and in the 90’s and the title Generation X has been used to refer to this style of literature as well as the generation of youth as a whole. Both literary movements are very similar to one another and can be considered the same movement on a global scale.

Both movements are authored primarily by young writers whose focus is current urban youth culture. Heavily influenced by global media, technology and pop-culture, literature of both McOndo and Generation X tend to be fast paced and graphic. References to popular international movies, music, and television titles are seen in nearly all instances, and drugs and sex play an important role in these stories. "Una influencia criminal", as well as the other stories from *Crecer es un oficio triste*, fits into these genres. The story is about the coming of age of a young teenager and his personal issues with peer pressure, identity, and sexuality. The characters participate in multiple illegal and immoral activities, and while some of the characters feel remorse for their actions the focus of the plot is not to condemn their behavior. Like the stories and novels of McOndo and Generation X, “Una influencia criminal” is an exploration of self, a way for the characters to place themselves in the world and a way for the authors to express modern youth culture in Latin America.
Translation itself is a problematic process, for while two languages can express the same idea equally well they do so using different sentence structures, vocabulary, idioms and nuance. Because of this, a perfect word-for-word translation is inherently impossible. There are several schools of thought on the various methods translation can undertake, ranging from both extremes of literal and interpretive. For this particular translation, I chose to use a balanced approach. The first draft aimed for the most literal exchange possible with the understanding that coherency and literary value would have to be worked on before the story could be read. Subsequent drafts reworked the literal English translation into a version that was easier to read and flowed more like the original Spanish text. Constant reference to the original material was required, and close contact with native speakers was invaluable for translating the trickier aspects of the text such as idioms, specific cultural references and grammatical issues. The final product is the result of the process of bringing a Spanish-language text into English while emphasizing the important themes common across modern literary movements worldwide, regardless of the original language.